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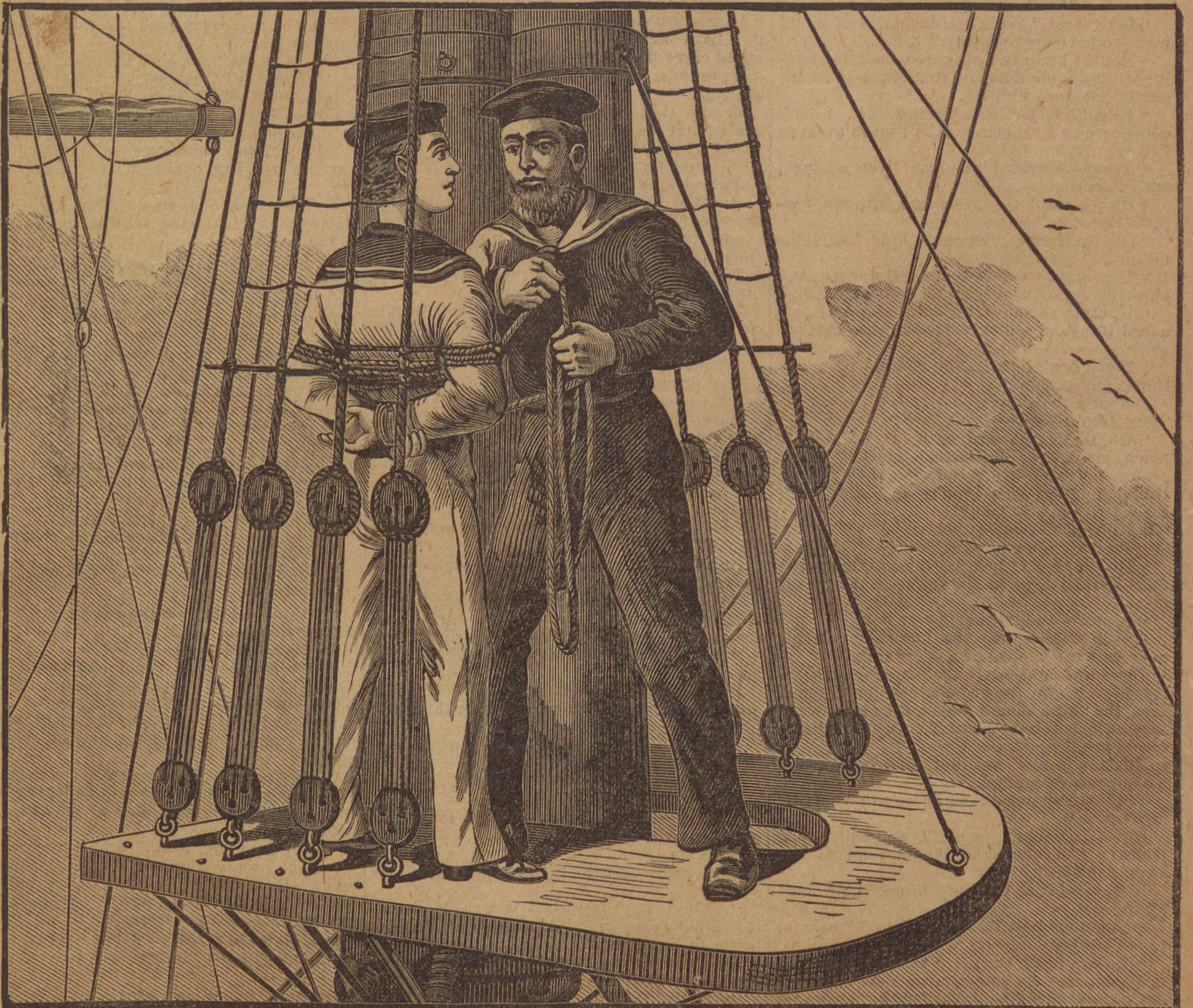
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JACK HARKAWAY AFLOAT.



Davage took a coil of rope, and, preceded by Jack, went up the rigging. When they came to the topmast, he tied him up tightly, so that it was impossible to extricate himself. "Very sorry, sir," he said. "But it's the captain's orders. "I'm all right; don't flurry your fat," replied Jack. "But Captain Cuttle may take his davy, I'll be even with him for this."

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JACK HARKAWAY AFLOAT.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH IS THE BEST MAN.

"Look here," replied Hunston, senior, "I mean to have my own way."

"Not if I know it," answered Jack, fearlessly; "at least, not if having your own way means any interference with me."

"I shall interfere with whom I like. I don't come here as a schoolboy, and I mean to do as I like."

"Always provided you can," replied Jack, with a provoking smile.

"Do you want to have a row with me?" replied Hunston, senior.

"Go it, Harry. He can't fight," said his brother.

"You ought to know something about that," observed Jack, turning round and kicking him.

"What do you mean by kicking my brother?" asked Hunston, senior, clenching his fists angrily.

"If you don't like it, you may do the other thing," replied Jack.

"What's that?"

"Lump it!"

"Oh, that's the size of it, is it? I must teach you better manners," said Hunston, senior. "I've licked better men than you on board ship, and since you're so cockey, we'll see who is the best man!"

"All right!" replied Jack.

"I'll back you up," said Harvey.

"Take my jacket then and my cap," answered Jack, giving them to Harvey as he took them off.

"A mill—a mill!" cried every one.

And in a short time the intending combatants were surrounded by a dense ring.

There was no usher in the playground, it being part of Mr. Crawcour's new programme that the boys should do as they liked while they occupied themselves in their own amusements in play hours.

Hunston, senior, was not long in following his opponent's example.

They both stripped themselves to their shirts and trousers.

Hunston, senior, was a tall, well built young fellow, rather clumsy in his movements, but strong and wiry.

It was evident that he did not think Jack formidable.

"You'll see how I'll polish him off," he said to his brother.

"He can fight, though I chaffed him just now, and said he couldn't; do lick him; you don't know how I hate that fellow," answered Arthur Hunston.

"Leave him to me. When I've done with him his own mother wouldn't know him. I

learned fighting at Portsmouth, and his friends will have to fetch a shutter to carry him off."

Popular feeling was slightly in Jack's favor. It was considered an unequal match, and the boys fancied that though Jack's pluck might carry him through a half-a-dozen or more rounds, he was sure to be badly beaten in the end.

Besides this, Hunston, senior, was a newcomer, and his "bouncing" off-hand manner was not liked either by young or old.

"Pepper him well, Jack," whispered Harvey. Jack nodded and stepped into the ring.

Hunston, senior, faced him, and carelessly threw out his left arm.

Jack parried the blow and stepped back, which threw his opponent forward.

Then he dashed in and struck him a violent blow on the nose.

The blood began to flow, but, nothing daunted, Hunston struck out right and left, and hitting Jack on the temple, he went down.

"Time!" cried Harvey.

The principals retired each to his corner, and their seconds attended to them.

Hunston's brother had got a sponge dipped in water, with which he bathed his face, and Harvey patted Jack on the back, saying:

"Not hurt, are you, old man!"

"Right as a turnip, and fresh as a daisy," replied Jack.

"Go in and win, then. They have sent their man up."

Hunston, senior, looked very determined and savage.

He made a rush at Jack, but failed to hit him, whereupon Jack feinted with his left and struck him in the stomach with his right.

"Oh!" ejaculated Hunston, doubling himself up.

Jack followed this advantage by dealing his opponent two heavy blows, one after the other, in the face, and Hunston rolled over.

"Time!" exclaimed his brother, who began to look rather grave.

Hunston, senior, gasped for breath, and sat still for nearly half a minute.

"I'm ready," he said. "That swab isn't going to have it all his own way."

"Hit straight at him and keep at a distance—your arms are long enough," replied his brother.

"Wait a bit," returned Harry Hunston, through his teeth; "I'll show him a trick I learnt at Port Rico."

Jack was waiting for him, and they walked round one another warily.

Presently Hunston, senior, retreated and drew Jack after him.

Then he advanced, ducked his head, causing Jack to miss his blow, put out his foot and

tripped him up, dealing him a terrific cut between the eyes which sent him spinning into Harvey's arms.

For some seconds Jack showed no signs of consciousness.

But at length he opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he said.

"I knew I would make him see stars!" exclaimed Hunston, senior, loudly.

At the sound of his voice Jack remembered everything, and was on his feet directly.

"Get him into chancery," suggested Harvey.

Jack nodded, and went up smiling, though he trembled a little and showed signs of punishment.

This time he made straight for his opponent, and they exchanged blow for blow several times without doing much damage.

At length Hunston made a rush.

Jack stumbled purposely, and Hunston fell over him; but Jack was up in an instant, and caught him round the neck with his left arm, holding him in an iron like grip.

Then he dealt him blow after blow in the face, until he fell from his hold and lay like a log on the ground.

"Bravo, Jack! Well done, Harkaway! Go it, Bedington!" arose on all sides.

And Harvey fairly danced with joy.

Hunston was dizzy and half stunned.

Suddenly he began to cough and choke, and gurgle dangerously in his throat.

"What's the matter?" said Collinson, stepping forward.

"I think he has swallowed a tooth," said Arthur Hunston.

It was as he supposed.

Harry Hunston had had one of his teeth broken short off by Jack's sledge hammer blows, and he swallowed the fragment.

It stuck in his throat first, but when slapped on the back it went down, and he breathed again.

Plucky to the last, he would not give in.

Stepping into the ring again he looked wildly around him, scarcely able to see out of his left eye.

"Give it to him, Jack!" said Harvey.

"You've bunged up one of his eyes, and the other isn't much good. You've half choked him with his own tooth, and if you don't give him what's-a-clock, it's your fault."

Jack knew that there was some strength left yet in his powerful opponent, and he advanced warily.

Hunston, senior, now tried what is known in France as the savate.

This is a sharp and quick kick in the face, which is not allowed in fair English fighting.

Unprepared for this, Jack was struck under the chin by the toe of his antagonist's boot in a way that made his teeth rattle like castanets and cut his tongue.

"Shamel shame!" cried half a dozen voices.

Jack spat out a mouthful of blood.

"The cowardly brute!" said Collinson.

Advancing on his toes, Jack showed he was not beaten, and Hunston, pretending to strike, tried the same plan.

This time Jack was ready for him, and he caught his foot in his hand and held him firmly, making him hop up and down while he hit him with his disengaged fist in the mouth and on the nose until he dropped to the ground beaten.

Arthur Hunston carried his brother to a corner and tried to revive him, but it was some time before he could do so.

When he opened his eyes, he said:

"You'll go up again?"

"No; I've had enough of it," replied Hunston, senior.

"Can't you peg away any more?"

"Not now."

Harvey approached.

"Well," said he, "are you licked?"

"Yes," replied Arthur Hunston, sulkily. "For this time, at least."

"Oh, don't alarm yourself," rejoined Harvey; "we'll oblige you whenever you call upon us."

Jack's friends came up and patted him on the back, congratulating him on his victory, which was a popular one.

Hunston, senior, had a very bad face, and felt weak and ill, but he contrived to go into school, and though the masters could tell there had been a fight, they took no notice of it, as Mr. Crawcour had advised them not to be too particular.

He had found that the very strict severe principle had failed, and he was going upon a different system.

"Boys will be boys," said his wife. "Let them fight and find their level."

Harvey and Jack walked away together to the pump in the yard after the fight, and Jack had his head pumped upon, which did him good.

"You've given Hunston, senior, what for," exclaimed Harvey.

"Yes; and now I must settle Maple. I won't have fellows sneaking about me. Besides, it spoils my ventriloquism. If I try it again, everyone will know who does it," said Jack.

"The little beast, I'd wig him."

"I say," exclaimed Jack, "you know the chief's aquarium? Wouldn't it be a lark to take it out of the drawing-room, and empty it into Maple's bed?"

"Rather!"

"We'll do it!"

"Fish and all?"

"Yes; we can carry it together."

"Right you are," replied Harvey. "I'm on!"

They were passing by the studios of the sixth form, one of which was occupied by Hunston, senior, who, as a big boy and an exceptional sort of pupil, had a right to one.

"Hark!" whispered Harvey.

Harry Hunston was speaking, and they could see his brother Arthur and Maple through a chink of the door.

"He's knocked me about pretty well," exclaimed Hunston, senior, "and I did not think he could fight, but the fact is his wind is good, and I am out of training; but I'll have my revenge—if I don't I'll eat my hat! If I can't be revenged one way, I will another!"

"How?" said Maple.

"You leave that to me. I'm not the fellow to stick at trifles. I don't have my teeth knocked down my throat for nothing."

"I should think not," said Maple.

"I hate that fellow Harkaway, or Bedington, or whatever his name is, and always did," remarked Arthur Hunston; "and now I hate him more than ever. He is like poison to me."

"I know how we got a fellow we didn't like kicked out of the navy," observed his brother.

"How was that?"

"I'll tell you some day when we take a walk in the fields. I don't like to talk here, because you never know who's sneaking about."

"That fellow Harvey is always poking his nose in something," said Maple.

Harvey shook his fist at the door.

"Come on!" exclaimed Jack. "I can't bear the idea of listening."

"But they are plotting against you."

"Let them plot. I'm not afraid of them," replied Jack fearlessly.

And they passed on.

"They mean to do you some harm in an underhand way, that is clear," said Harvey.

"If they can."

"What's to prevent them?"

"Oh, don't bother yourself about shadows. I tell you I'm not afraid of them," replied Jack impatiently.

The dinner bell rang and they went into the lavatory to wash and brush their hair before dinner.

In spite of Jack's easy manner, he could not disguise from himself that there was danger in the hatred of such a young man as Harry Hunston.

He had been dismissed from the navy for bad conduct, so he boasted that he would stick at nothing, and was capable of anything.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

As Maple slept in the same dormitory as Jack and Harvey, it was easy enough to play him the trick they had agreed upon.

When the house was still Jack went down stairs and took the aquarium from the drawing room.

Harvey pulled down the clothes of Maple's bed, and Jack emptied the water, fish, sand and shells into it, while Harvey immediately covered the sleeper up again.

Both boys then got into bed, Jack having put the empty aquarium into a corner.

Maple woke up with a scream.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack. "How you do snore to-night! You won't let a fellow sleep."

"I've had a bad dream," answered Maple.

"What was it?"

"Oh, a beastly dream, and so like reality. I thought I was on board ship and we got wrecked. I fell into the sea and began to sink until I reached the bottom, and lay among the shells and sand with all sorts of beastly big, shark-like fish swimming round me. I feel quite wet and slippery. I never had such a beastly dream before, and I can't bring myself to believe it isn't real."

"Go to sleep and don't bother me with your sharks," said Jack.

There was a momentary silence.

Suddenly Maple exclaimed:

"Hallo!"

"At it again, are you?" cried Jack. "I shall have to lick you, my boy, if you aren't quiet."

"I've caught a fish," said Maple.

"Caught your grandmother," replied Jack, derisively.

"And here's another, and the bed's wet through and through. Am I at sea, or where am I? Can I have been drowned?"

"It's my opinion you're going off your nut," answered Jack.

Maple, however, sprang out of bed, and pulled up the blind, which let the moonlight through and enabled him to see that his bed was literally soaked through.

Fish of all sorts were moving about, and a pretty mess there was in the sheets, what with sand and shells and the rest of it.

"What a shame!" exclaimed Maple. "I'll tell Mr. Crawcour of this. Here's a trout and goldfish, and a horrid red-looking thing. You'll get it for this, Jack."

"Why, you little disputer," said Jack, "do you mean to say I did it? I'll skin you if you tell stories about me."

Somewhat alarmed, Maple answered: "I did not mean to say it was you, but—"

"You'd better not, that's all."

"It's very odd, though," continued Maple, "and somebody must have put all these things in my bed; they could not have come there of their own accord."

"No one said they could."

"Will you let me sleep in your bed to-night, Jack?"

"No, I'll see you hanged first, and then I won't."

"Why not?"

"Because I hate sneaks."

Maple turned to Harvey, but he was equally obdurate, and at last he rolled himself up in the counterpane and slept on the floor, vowing that he'd let Mr. Crawcour know all about it in the morning, and then somebody would find out his mistake.

Jack employed himself, with Harvey's help, in picking up the fish and shells as well as he could, and putting them back in the glass bowl, which he filled with water from the jug.

Only one carp was dead, and that he threw up the chimney.

Then he carried the aquarium down stairs and put it back in its usual place.

Maple watched Jack at work, and could not help saying:

"I know it was you, Harkaway, and I'll tell of you as sure as fate."

"Will you? then you shall have something to tell about," answered Jack, adding, "Harvey, old man, get the poker and rake that fish down I shied up the chimney."

Harvey did so, and held it out in his hand nicely covered with soot.

"You like fish, and you shall eat it," exclaimed Jack, seizing Maple by the neck.

"What! Eat that nasty thing?"

"Yes, soot and all."

"It isn't cooked."

"All the better! Shove it down his throat, Harvey, if he won't chew it, while I hold him tight."

A little pressure under the ears caused Maple to open his mouth.

The fish was put in, and to avoid being choked, he was obliged to eat, which he did slowly and with great disgust.

"Is it gone?" asked Jack.

"Yes," answered Maple, with a gurgle, as he gulped down the last bit of the head, adding with a shudder:

"Oh, I feel so ill and sick! Let me lie still! Let me die!"

Jack laughed and said:

"That will teach you not to sneak about me; and if you get me into a row for this I'll have it out with you somehow."

"I'll never sneak again—never, never," muttered Maple.

"Then I've done you some good, and you'll grow up a decent fellow, for which you ought to truly thank your humble servant."

Maple groaned, and Jack and Harvey went to bed again, leaving the wretched victim of their cure for sneaking to digest his supper.

However revengeful Maple might have felt, he took very good care not to incur Jack's resentment by saying anything, which was all the more agreeable to Jack, as he was to be tried by a jury, as we have said, in three days, and his sentence would have been more severe if any other complaint was made against him.

Mr. Crawcour expected great results from his new system of trial by jury. As half the jury was composed of the boys and the other half of masters, it was a fair and impartial tribunal.

When the time came the jury was selected, and sat in Mr. Crawcour's study.

The case against Jack was stated by Mr. Mole, and on Maple's evidence against him he was found guilty of maliciously practicing ventriloquism in school hours to create a disturbance, make the boys laugh, and upset the master.

But the jury recommended him to mercy.

Mr. Crawcour then passed sentence, saying that, had it not been for the recommendation of the jury, he should have inflicted the punishment of the birch, which he intended to use in the future instead of cane, in extreme cases; but, as it was, he should sentence him to Coventry for one week, and anyone caught speaking to him would be heavily dealt with.

Jack thought he had got off very well, as he infinitely preferred the silent system to being soundly birched, and congratulated himself on his good luck.

"A week will soon pass," he said to himself; "and I have several books I want to read. 'I shall be able to get through 'Robinson Crusoe' during play hours, which I shouldn't have been able to do if I had been playing at prisoner's base or hoppy in the playground."

So Jack put a good face on it and went about smiling, though no one addressed a word to him, for fear of being themselves punished for such a breach of discipline.

The insurgent spirit which for the last half day had pervaded the school, from the highest to the lowest, had passed away.

The boys spoke of the barring out with pride, but didn't hint at doing such a thing again.

In fact, Mr. Crawcour's authority was restored, and his heart was cheered by the efforts his wife made to help him in his business.

She behaved now as a schoolmaster's wife should; attended to the boys, and spoke to them in a motherly manner.

The week passed quickly as Jack had expected, and though the enforced silence was irksome he bore it bravely, and did not murmur, for he knew he had been wrong, and had sense enough to know that order could not reign in the school if the boys did not obey their masters.

He did not mind the infliction of a fair amount of punishment when he knew he had deserved it.

One day a circumstance occurred which enabled his enemies to have their revenge upon him in a remarkable manner.

He received a letter from little Emily.

It contained a post-office order for two pounds ten, which she said were her savings for two years, and she did not know what better to do with the money than send it to her dear old Jack.

She had thought of giving it to the missionaries, but she had changed her mind.

In conclusion she begged him not to say a word about it to anybody, as her father, Mr. Scratchley, would be very angry if by any means he heard she had broken open her money-box and sent its contents to him.

Jack took Harvey on one side and showed him the letter.

"We'll go into the town," he exclaimed, "and get it changed, and go to the pastry shop and have a tuck in. I owe Mrs. Croy some money, and I'll pay her."

"All right," said Harvey. "Won't it be jolly?"

And his mouth watered at the prospect of unlimited tarts, cheese, cakes and cream.

"Don't say a word, because if Mr. Crawcour heard of it he might write to Mr. Scratchley, and I don't want to get Emily into a row."

"Not I," answered Harvey. "I'm as tight as wax when a fellow wants to keep a secret. I shan't blab."

By some chance Maple overheard this conversation, and, hastening to Hunston, senior, he repeated it to him.

"Well, what of it?" said Harry Hunston.

"Why, I'll tell you," replied Maple, his wicked little eyes twinkling maliciously. "My father sent me two pounds ten yesterday, and I haven't touched it."

"What of that?"

"Suppose I were to give it to you to mind for me?"

"Where is it now?"

"In my desk."

"It's quite safe there."

"Yes, I know," said Maple; "but you don't understand me."

"No, I don't," replied Hunston, senior, bluntly.

"I'll say somebody stole it, and swear I saw Jack at my desk."

"Oh," ejaculated Hunston. "I smell a mice; in other words I begin to twig."

"You see," continued Maple, "he won't admit that he has had any money, because of this Emily who sent him it."

"But he can prove payment of the order."

"He can if he likes, but I tell you he won't. I know him better than you do. If he says a thing he sticks to it. We'll prove that he has had two pounds ten. I'll say I have lost that sum, and if he can't and won't account for the money he's had, people will say he stole mine. If he does clear himself, and tell about this girl Emily, I can say I'm sorry for accusing him, and there's an end to it."

"It's good enough to try on," said Hunston, senior.

"I hate him," cried Maple, "for making me eat that fish and lots of other things. Whenever he passes me he pulls my ears or kicks me, and calls me a sneak."

"You don't hate the big slashing brute more than I do, my dear boy," answered Harry Hunston, feelingly. "I haven't forgotten the hiding he gave me, nor ever shall."

"Will you help me in my plan?"

"Like a shot."

"All right. I'll bring you the coin and to-night I'll begin to sing out about my loss," said Maple.

"It's a good dodge," answered Hunston, senior. "What will the chief do with him, do you think? Send him away?"

"No, he'll birch him. Crawcour does not send fellows away; it doesn't pay. But the birching isn't much; he'll soon get over that. It won't hurt after a day or two. What I am thinking of is the shame he will feel, and the fine chaff we can have against him."

"So we can. He won't like being called a thief."

"All the sixth form will cut him, and even his friend, Collinson, will have to give him the cold shoulder after he has been found out thieving," exclaimed Maple.

"It's a rattling good idea," said Hunston, senior. "and I'll back you up in it like a brick. Go and get the tin."

Maple went to his locker and brought the money to Hunston, who put it in his pocket with a subdued grin. It may be added that Maple never saw a halfpenny of it again, for Hunston, senior, did not like parting with

money when it was once given into his hands except for the gratification of his own pleasure.

He would drink beer and spirits in town, and play at billiards at the inn when there was a holiday and he could get out.

Maple little imagined that the money was not safe in Hunston, senior's, hands, or his miserly little heart would have been broken, and he would have given up his idea of vengeance upon Jack.

Our hero meanwhile, was perfectly unconscious of the plot in preparation against him.

But the mine was soon to burst, as his enemies were active, and that very night Maple began to talk about his loss.

It is very unpleasant to everyone in a school when money is lost, and the boys soon began to take an interest in it.

Jack was almost the last to hear of it, and the information came from Harvey.

"What do you think?" exclaimed the latter, "Maple's lost his money."

"A good job, too, I'm glad of it, the dirty little cur," answered Jack.

"But he says you have bagged it."

"I? Does he say that?" Jack cried, coloring up angrily.

"Well, he doesn't exactly say so in so many words, but he says he saw you at his locker to-day."

"That's odd. I did go to his desk," replied Jack, "this afternoon to borrow a ruler. It was the only desk I saw unlocked, and as he wasn't there I took it. Where is he?"

Up at the other end of the room, talking to Hunston senior, and Collinson.

"I'll give him something for talking about me," exclaimed Jack, compressing his lips tightly together.

The boys were preparing their lessons for the next day; some were talking, some writing, others reading. Mr. Mole, the master in charge, was out of the room.

"Maple," said Jack, addressing his enemy, "What do you mean by saying I took your money?"

"I only said I thought you might have done it out—out of a lark," said Maple, turning pale.

Jack caught him a stinging box on the ears.

Maple began to cry, and got behind Collinson, who said:

"Don't hit the fellow; I won't have it. He was complaining to me as head of the school, and I won't have him touched."

"Why does he go and tell lies about me?" yelled Jack, his eyes flashing indignantly.

"How do I know they are lies?"

"Oh, Collinson!" exclaimed Jack, looking hurt; "you can't believe I would steal anything?"

"I did not say so, but the charge must be inquired into. Here's Mr. Mole. I will speak to him."

"The senior master approached Collinson, saying, 'Who is that crying? I was walking in the yard when I heard a dismal wail.'"

"Harkaway Bedington struck Maple."

"That was wrong. I am afraid, Harkaway, you have a fondness for bullying, and you know Mr. Crawcour does not like it," said Mr. Mole, addressing Jack.

"He deserved it, sir."

"No matter; if he is impertinent, you should complain to me."

"The fact is, sir, Maple has lost two pounds ten out of his desk," exclaimed Collinson; and he says that he saw Harkaway there, and just after he had taken something out he missed the money."

"Oh, indeed," observed Mr. Mole, looking grave.

"It seems very curious, sir," remarked a boy named Jackson. "But yesterday Harkaway was so hard up that he borrowed a shilling from me."

"Yes," said Hunston, junior. "I saw him do that, and to-day he was in the pastry-cook's with Harvey, when I was there. He paid his tick, and he and Harvey ate nearly everything in the shop."

"This is very strange," Mr. Mole exclaimed. "What have you to say, Harkaway?"

Jack was silent.

He could have cleared himself in a moment, but he had said he would not betray Emily, whose request to preserve secrecy about her present to him was sacred in his eyes, and his dogged, obstinate nature would not allow him to break his word.

Yet he could see how cleverly he was caught in the meshes of the net prepared for him by his enemies, though he did not suspect them, just then, of being so base as to have plotted for his annoyance."

He thought Maple was sincere in saying that he fancied Jack was the thief.

"Have those boys spoken the truth?" continued Mr. Mole, in a loud and severe voice.

Everyone looked at Jack, whose face grew deadly pale.

CHAPTER III.

THIEF! THIEF!

"WELL!" cried Mr. Mole, impatiently, "can't you speak?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "It is all true."

He spoke with difficulty, and seemed much embarrassed, which those near him put down as signs of guilt, when, in reality, he was only nervous at having such a charge brought against him.

"You had no money yesterday?"

"None at all, sir, except the bob—the shilling that Jackson lent me."

"And yet you paid a bill and treated Harvey to tarts, this afternoon, at a shop in Lille Bridge," continued Mr. Mole.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you had any money sent you, or seen any friend, who has given you some?"

"I can't answer that question, sir," replied Jack.

"Why not?"

"I have my reasons."

A murmur of astonishment ran round the little circle of boys.

"Foolish fellow," said Mr. Mole, with more kindness than he usually displayed. "Don't you see that the only way to clear your character is to account for the possession of the money you are proved to have had? By the way, how much had you this afternoon?"

"Two pounds ten, sir."

"The very amount Maple has lost," cried Mr. Mole, exchanging a significant glance with Collinson.

"All in gold it was," put in Maple.

"Silence!" exclaimed the senior master. "Don't you see the force of what I say, Harkaway?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet you won't speak?"

"I cannot; as I said before, I have my reasons."

"Do you deny taking, or I should say stealing the money of Maple's?"

"Certainly I do. I never knew he had it in his desk. I am not a thief, sir," Jack replied, openly and boldly.

"It is very odd," said Mr. Mole, in perplexity.

"He had it safe enough," exclaimed Maple.

"Will you hold your tongue? If not, I shall send you to bed without any supper!" Mr. Mole exclaimed.

Maple subsided.

"Harkaway did not take the money, sir," said a voice. It was Harvey.

"What do you know about it?" asked the senior master.

"He could clear himself in a moment, if he liked."

"How?"

Harvey was about to speak, when Jack said:

"Harvey, remember what you promised. If I don't say anything, I don't want you to."

Harvey was silent.

"Come, come, come; if you can do your friend a service, do not hesitate," Mr. Mole said.

But Harvey remained obstinately silent.

"It's as clear as daylight," exclaimed the irrepressible Maple. "Of course he stands in—"

Mr. Mole seized Maple by the collar, and put him in a corner with his face to the wall.

"Just you stop there till the supper-bell rings," he exclaimed.

The boys laughed and Maple made a wry face, but remained in the "fool's corner" all the same, knowing that the senior master was not to be trifled with.

Then returning to Jack, Mr. Mole said, very seriously:

"Look here, Harkaway; this is no trifling matter. I must repeat it to Mr. Crawcour. You are accused."

"By whom, sir?" asked Jack.

"Well, suspected of stealing money can't munge the matter, and I really must say in all candor that the evidence, so far as I have heard it, points in your direction. Does it not, now, I ask you?"

"Yes, sir, it does, and I don't blame you for your remarks."

"Then my duty is clear, by your own admission. I must consult the Principal."

"Very well, sir."

"You still refuse to speak?"

"I cannot say anything more than that I am innocent, and perhaps you will know all some day," answered Jack, in a tone of resignation.

Mr. Mole looked at him crossly and left the room. A buzz of conversation instantly arose, and the matter was loudly and generally discussed.

"Collinson," exclaimed Jack.

"Don't talk to me," replied the captain of the school.

"Why not? We used to be such friends."

"Used to be."

"Are we not now?"

"I don't want to say anything unpleasant, Mr. Harkaway Bedington," replied Collinson; "therefore, if you have any regard for your feelings, you won't speak to me."

"Oh, very well," replied Jack, looking hurt and turning away.

"Tell him what he is," said Hunston, senior.

"What's that?" asked Jack, facing him sharply.

"A dirty thief."

In an instant Jack struck at him, and sent him rolling over a form half stunned.

Then he caught up a ruler and brandished it threateningly.

"Don't any of you touch me," he exclaimed; "if you do, by George, I'll floor the first fellow who comes near me."

The crowd shrank back.

"I'm not a thief, whatever you may think," he continued, "and I don't mean to stand any nonsense or humbug."

Whatever disposition Collinson and the other members of the sixth may have had to resent, his sudden but not unprovoked assault upon Hunston, they did not attempt to interfere with him, and retired down the room to where Harvey was sitting.

A small hiss arose, which grew into a general chorus.

Some one said, "Thief!" and "Thief! thief!" was heard on all sides.

Jack sat down by the side of his only friend, and his eyes burned, and his lips were parched and dry.

"Here's a go," said Harvey.

"Never mind," answered Jack; "they will find it out some day. I'll write to Emily and ask her permission to tell. It don't matter; it's a new sensation for them, and I know I'm not guilty."

"You are an ass," said Harvey.

"Why?"

"For putting up with this, when one word put it right."

"That one word will never be spoken by me, unless I have dear little Emily's permission."

"It's carrying one's idea of honor a little too far."

"I don't think so. I'm a peculiar fellow, and I think I once told you so; you don't know me yet, old boy. I'm like a rosebud, and I shall unfold slowly beneath the sun of your acquaintance."

"You're a fine fellow anyhow. I know I couldn't beat this like you. You'll get flogged, perhaps."

"It won't kill me," replied Jack, with a smile.
 "It'll hurt, though, confoundingly."
 "I shall think it is for Emily's sake."
 "I won't try and argue the point with you, because you know best."
 Jack was about to reply, when Mr. Tole entered, telling him that Mr. Crawcour wanted him in his study.
 He rose, and slowly followed the senior master to the Principal's room.
 His heart fluttered a little, but he determined not to give way.

CHAPTER IV.

IN TROUBLE AGAIN.

MR. CRAWCOUR looked up as Jack entered and exclaimed:

"Oh, here you are, Bedington. What is this Mr. Mole tells me?"

"About Maple's money, sir?" answered Jack.

"Yes; somebody has extracted a large sum from his desk. I wish my boy's friends would not send them so much at a time. It is only a temptation to them and to others. I am told that the evidence points to you as the waken!—the culprit."

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"Do you persist in that denial?"

"Undoubtedly."

"In that case there will be nothing for it but to have you tried by my new system of the jury; and that you may have nothing to complain of, the twelve shall be all chosen from your schoolfellows by yourself, and Collinson shall be the judge. Is that fair?"

"It seems so, sir."

"And you will not think it unjust if I inflict upon you any punishment the judge sentences you to?"

"No, sir. I can't clear myself, so I suppose I must put up with it; still I should be glad if you did not believe me guilty."

"What else can I do?" answered the Principal.

"Circumstances are against me. I may be mischievous and troublesome, but I am not so bad as to thief. Besides, why should I? I can always get money from home by writing for it."

"I know your friends are rich. But I must do my duty for the sake of example. Sleep over the matter, and perhaps to-morrow morning you may have changed your mind and be inclined to speak. If you can clear yourself as you say, it is sheer insanity to remain silent. You can go now."

Jack went away and spent the evening in preparing his lessons for the morrow.

The master being in the room, the boys did not tease Jack any more, though in going up to bed he was chaffed on the stairs.

However, he bore it with fortitude, and treated his enemies with contempt.

The next day he, at Mr. Crawcour's request, selected twelve of the boys from the sixth form to try him.

They went into the evidence, and, as a matter of course, he was found guilty.

Collinson passed sentence upon him, saying that a boy who could commit so mean an action as to steal another's pocket-money deserved to be birched.

Accordingly, Jack had to kneel down before a chair, in the middle of the room, in the presence of the whole school, and Mr. Mole and Mr. Stonor held him, while Mr. Crawcour gave him twenty strokes with a birch.

He got up tingling with the pain, but not caring much for it, as he knew he had not deserved it, and took his place next to Harvey, as usual.

Silence reigned in the school, and the ordinary work of the day was proceeded with.

Mr. Crawcour spoke to Collinson and some of the leading boys, saying that as Jack had been dealt with he hoped they would not make his life miserable and chaff him about the theft.

But Jack was decidedly cut.

Harvey stuck to him, and during the play hour walked around with him.

Jack was dull, and did not speak much.

"Don't be down in the mouth, old fellow," said Harvey.

"I can't help it," answered Jack. "There is a fatality about me. Everything I do is wrong, and I am sure to get into rows somehow, whether I deserve it or not."

"What will you do now? Write to Emily?"

"No. They have done their worst. I shall simply defy the whole school, and the masters included. I shan't write to Emily," said Jack, putting his fists together, as he always did when he was determined.

"Oh, Jack," cried Harvey, in surprise.

"What more can they do?" continued Jack. "If Maple's money has really been stolen, the thief will be found out some day."

"I don't think it has."

"Don't you? That view of the question never occurred to me before."

"I think he did it out of revenge, and Hunston, senior, backed him up in it."

"I'll make it my business to find out. But of this I am certain. God never allows a wicked action to pass undiscovered. If they have done me this great wrong, it will all come home to them."

"Shut them up at once, Jack," exclaimed Harvey.

"You can do it by writing to Emily."

"I won't. What does it matter to me if the fellows I was formerly chums with cut me? I shall know who my friends are in future. It will be rather fine to be called a thief."

"But if you don't write to Emily, and nothing turns up, they will always think you one."

"Something will happen; I know it will."

"Won't you feel wretched at being chaffed and missed?"

"They don't try to do it here, because they are afraid of me. Let me catch them at it. I'd fight any half-

dozen of them; one down and the other come on," replied Jack, fiercely.

"You gave Hunston, senior, a regular nose-ender last night," observed Harvey, with a laugh.

"Served the big overgrown brute right, too. That fellow is a beast. He has a bad face."

"So I think. I wonder how the tooth you made him swallow, when you milled him, agreed with him?"

"Here he is. Let's walk away. Come to the field; we shall be alone then. I don't want another row with him," said Jack, hastily.

And they moved away.

They had not gone far before they met Collinson, and they were passing by without speaking, when the captain of the school said:

"Oh, Harkaway, I want a word with you, if you can spare me a moment."

"Certainly," answered Jack, in his usual good-natured, cheery manner.

"At this time of the year, February, we always start our paper chase. I think I spoke to you about it last week."

"Yes."

"Will you lead one for us?"

"I might steal your paper," answered Jack, sarcastically.

"Don't chaff," replied Collinson. "If you were guilty, it does not follow that you are always to be taunted with it, and as you and Harvey are two of the best runners in the school, and the longest-winded, and you know the country pretty well, we want you to lead us a good chase. Will you do it?"

"I don't mind," replied Jack. "But if you have such a bad opinion of me as to think that I stole—"

"We won't talk about that. I hope it is not so. I believe you to be innocent. I do, indeed; but appearances were against you, and are now."

"Thank you for that," said Jack, warmly. "I'll lead your paper chase, but I would not have done it before. You will all find out your mistake some day, but at present I cannot put myself right."

"I hope sincerely you will. You cannot have a better well-wisher than I am," replied Collinson. "I am very much in the position in which you are."

Jack wrung his proffered hand.

"Then, continued Collinson, 'I will tell the fellows that you and Harvey will lead the chase with pleasure.' They separated, and Jack said to Harvey:

"Collinson is a stunner. He sets a good example to the school; we shan't get another captain like him when he's gone."

"He leaves next half."

"Yes, I know, to go to Oxford."

"Have you ever led a paper chase before?" asked Harvey.

"No, but I know all about it, as I have heard the fellows talk."

"I've been here longer than you, and we had several beauties last year. Do you know the line of country?"

"Not much," answered Jack.

"Well, I do. I have been all about for miles round, and the best way is to go as the bird flies and take all the ditches one comes to."

"Have you got any bags to put the paper in?"

"Yes, and I have some paper left over from last year. We must get all the old papers and books we can find to tear up, for I mean to give them a winder this time. Collinson knows I am the best runner in the school, and always had the best chance, and he also knows I wouldn't go without you, which—"

"Accounts for his asking me to lead," said Jack.

"Exactly."

"Never mind; I don't hate any of them. I dare say I should behave as they have done if circumstances had been different. Let's go and get the paper ready."

"All right; I'm your man," answered Harvey.

And they went together to the school-room, where Harvey found his bags.

They soon began to fill them with paper, which they tore into little bits.

Each boy who led was accustomed to carry two bags, one slung over each shoulder.

In starting, they had a quarter of an hour's grace allowed them.

That is to say, the head of the following party, or the hounds, took out his watch when the leaders of the hares, as they are sometimes called, started, and counted fifteen minutes.

They all ran along in their track quickly.

The leaders dropped bits of paper in the roads and the fields as they went, to show the direction they had taken.

If they jumped, or swam, or plunged through a brook—of which there are plenty in Hertfordshire—they left paper on each side.

So that the hounds or followers could plainly see which way they had gone, though they were far away and out of sight.

The object of the chase was to catch the hares before they could get home again; and there were many good runners in the school, so that the chase was always an interesting feature in the outdoor amusements of the boys.

Two better, or stronger, or swifter hares than Jack and Harvey could not have been selected.

We must give an account of the chase, which might by itself be uninteresting, because it gave rise to an occurrence which proved of some value to Jack.

CHAPTER V.

THE PAPER CHASE.]

THE occasion chosen for the "hare and hounds," or paper chase, was a half-holiday.

Dinner was over at a quarter of two, and at half-past the hares started.

The boys seemed to have forgotten Jack's conviction for the supposed stealing of Maple's money, for they

gave him a cheer when he set off at a good swinging jog trot, elbows went into his side, back bent and head thrown a little forward, with Harvey on his left hand.

Thin and wiry, Harvey was a splendid runner, and when he boasted that he did not think the hounds could catch him, he was not bragging idly.

Perhaps Collinson's sensible conduct in picking out Jack to lead the chase had some effect on the boys.

If the sixth form frowned on him and led a persecution, all the lower boys would follow, as a matter of course.

But Collinson really liked Jack in his heart.

He could not help thinking him guilty of stealing Maple's money, although he could not understand the why and wherefore, but he made an allowance for him in a spirit of true Christian charity, and did not want to see him sent to Coventry again, and this time by the consent of his schoolfellows.

In fact, he had by his generous behavior done much to remove the prejudice existing against Jack, which was fostered in every way by Maple and the two Hunstons.

They raised an objection to "following a thief," but as they did not find any one to agree with them, they made up their minds to join the hunt, rather than lose the fun of it.

Harvey and Jack were in excellent form, and cut out the pace at a rate which promised to baffle their pursuers.

The country thereabouts was admirably fitted for just the sort of pastime they were indulging in.

It was flat and moist, rich meadows were intersected by ditches full of water and streams, the hedges were but stunted bushes on raised banks.

There was scarcely any wind, so that the paper lay where it fell, and the trail was perfect.

"Do you know Black Adder Wood, Jack?" said Harvey.

"I've heard of it," answered Jack, "though I've never been there. It's on my father's estate, a mile or two beyond the Willow Copse. They say it grows good blackberries."

"I should think it did, too. That's just what took me there, and the recollection of a very tidy stomach-ache brings it forcibly before me. Blackberries are awful things to give a fellow the mull-grubs. But what I was going to say is this, it wouldn't be a bad lark to take the hounds through the wood. On the other side there is a lot of plowed land leading down into the main road, which we could use as an easy means of making for home."

"I don't mind," replied Jack, "though I must confess I should not like to get lost in the wood."

They had stopped to talk.

Suddenly they heard a shout.

It came from the hounds.

Jack climbed up a tree, which gave him a view of the surrounding country.

"Hunston, senior, Collinson and Maple are leading," he said. "And very pretty play with their legs they are making, too."

"Wire in," answered Harvey, starting again. Putting on the steam and throwing a little life into it, as Jack observed, they were soon out of sight.

So they went on until they reached the confines of Black Adder Wood, a wild and extensive piece of timber-covered land, which was never interfered with or thinned out.

Occasionally the wanderer in its depths would come across a couple of swarthy fellows, who looked like demons, but who, in reality, were nothing more than charcoal-burners.

They had a hut in the wood where they lived for three or four days and nights, only going into the town on Friday night, and staying in their regular homes till the beginning of the next week.

The boys plunged into the wood, pushing their way through, and making the trail lie as well as they could, but it was hard work.

"I wish we had kept to the open," said Jack. "Are you sure you know your way through?"

"I think so. We can't go back now, because we should be caught if we did, and that would look foolish," answered Harvey.

"It was a stupid thing to leave the grass. Hang the twigs, how they hurt!" cried Jack, beating back the branches, which would fly in his face.

"That's what you said yesterday, when the Principal was performing, wasn't it?" said Harvey, with a sly smile.

"I shall answer you, as somebody says to the queen, in Virgil: 'Oh! cruel queen, you order me to renew my grief.' Birching is one of the delicate operations which ought not to be alluded to out of school, so with your kind permission we will drop it."

Harvey laughed, and said:

"By the way, Jack, it would be a jolly spree to make the hounds lose themselves in the wood, by breaking off the trail. If they came to a break, they'd hunt here and there and get utterly fogged at last."

"Let's do it, and start the trail again on the other side of the road. Some of them will strike it."

"All right. Don't throw any more paper," Harvey observed.

They stopped casting away paper and pressed on.

It seemed as if they would never come to the extremity of the wood.

An hour or more had passed since they entered it.

The shouts of boys calling loudly to one another showed that the hounds had entered the wood and had lost their way, as Jack and Harvey had anticipated they would.

By ceasing to cast down paper, the hounds had become puzzled.

While the leaders did so, the followers could always keep the main track.

Now they were all at sea.

"Here's a pretty how-d'ye-do," laughed Harvey, standing still in a small, open glade which had some bundles of straw in it, put there for the pheasants by the keepers.

"Yes, it's a nice start, and it's my opinion we are in Queer street," replied Jack.

"If we could only find one of the paths used by the charcoal-burners."

"It's getting dark, and I'm getting peckish. I didn't have much to eat at dinner to-day, so that I might run better, and now I feel as empty as an old drum."

"I could do with a chop and some muffins," answered Harvey; "but it's my idea we shan't have the luck to tumble across anything till we get home."

"Which may not be till next week."

"Don't croak," said Harvey.

They were bewildered and perplexed, not knowing which way to turn, and the growing darkness threatened to add materially to their troubles.

"Hark! what's that?" said Jack.

Both listened.

"Hide! hide! It's Maple and Hunston, senior," continued Jack, almost forcing his companion behind the trunk of a large tree.

Hunston, senior, and Maple were quarreling.

"I don't believe a word you say," exclaimed Maple.

"It's true; when I first got lost in this infernal wood I stumbled across some fellows with fires, burning charcoal," said Harry Hunston.

"It is very odd I didn't see them."

"You were not in that direction. They are on the eastern side, and this is the western; and, as I take it—"

"And they robbed you?"

"Yes."

"A likely story. What did they steal from you?" growled Maple.

He knew he could afford to be impudent and familiar with Hunston, senior, because they were accomplices in the plot to ruin Jack's honor.

"Why, all I had; your two pounds ten, I mean."

Jack squeezed Harvey's arm convulsively.

"Do you hear that?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"Listen," returned Harvey, in the same tone.

"What shall I do?" said Maple; "that tin was to have lasted the half, and now I shan't be able to buy a walnut, or a pear, or an apple. I shan't have any tarts or sweet stuff. What a nuisance! Are you sure it is all gone?"

"Quite sure. Just as you took the money out of your locker, I put it into my pocket; the charcoal-burners rushed at me; one held me, while the others turned my pockets inside out."

There was an air of sincerity about Hunston, senior's, narrative which convinced Maple that the prospect of seeing his money back again was very slight indeed.

"I wish those charcoal-burners had been, I know where, before they had my money," he said.

"Don't stand jawing there, you young donkey," cried Harry Hunston. "I want to get home before it's quite dark."

"Come on, then. I can't help being wild," Maple said.

They moved in the direction of a path in the brush-wood, which was just what Harvey was looking for.

It was the footway used by the charcoal-burners, which Hunston had hit upon accidentally.

Jack sprang forward before they had gone more than a few steps.

"Stop a bit, Hunston," he said, putting himself before him. "I have something to say to you before you go any further."

Hunston, senior, turned pale, visible even in the dim light.

Maple tried to get away, but Harvey caught him by the neck and nearly throttled him.

"Oh, don't! don't hurt me, Harvey!" he whined.

"I'll do anything you ask me. I will indeed. Oh, I wish I had never come here."

"Shut up," was Harvey's reply.

For a moment there was a dead silence.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNSHINE AFTER STORM.

"WHAT do you want?" asked Harry Hunston, standing at bay.

"You ought to know as well as any one," answered Jack.

"If I did, I should not ask you. What's your little game?" Hunston continued, affecting a bold air, and intending to brazen it out.

"I have overheard your conversation, Mr. Maple."

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves. I thought you were mean enough for anything, and now I know it," sneered Hunston.

"I am not so mean as to get up a plot to take away a fellow's character because I hate him."

"We'll talk about that when we get home."

"No, we won't; I have found you out."

"You've got to prove it, and my word is as good as yours," Hunston replied.

"You will come with me to the charcoal-burners, and I will ask them what money they took from you."

"I shall do nothing of the sort; make me."

Hunston folded his arms and assumed an attitude of defiance.

"I've licked you once and I can do it again," Jack replied; "and by Jove I'll thrash you within an inch of your life, if you don't walk before me to those men. I am determined to sift this matter to the bottom, now that I have begun."

"Oh, you are. Come on then. I can stand a little punishment; and perhaps you won't have it all your own way this time."

Jack knew the value of the first blow, and seeing that his enemy meant business, he dashed out his right and rolled Hunston over like an ox.

He was standing over him in an instant, and as soon as he got on his knees hit him again.

"You coward!" said Hunston, lying on the grass. "It isn't fair to hit a man when he's down."

"I don't mean to fight fairly with you," Jack rejoined.

"I shall take every advantage I can."

Hunston, senior, tried to get up; but he was knocked over again, his nose and mouth streaming with blood.

In fact, Jack had it all his own way.

He was not fighting fairly, and he knew it; but with such an opponent he thought any means justifiable.

"Will you do as I tell you?" said Jack, seeing Hunston did not attempt to rise.

"No, I shall lie here. 'You'll have to drag me; I won't walk. Perhaps you'll kick me; you're brute enough!' exclaimed Hunston, senior.

"I shan't kick you; but I'll cut a stick from one of these trees and leather you with it till you consent to go with me. I'm not joking. If I say I'll tan you, I will."

Jack bent down a bough and cut from it a long pliable switch which he brought in contact with Hunston's shoulders with a will.

He soon tried to get up and meet his assailant on more equal terms; but Jack was too quick for him and he went to grass again.

"You'd better knock under," Jack exclaimed, holding the switch in the air.

"All right. Your one too many for me," replied Hunston. "I'll go quietly if you'll leave off."

Jack let him get up, which he did with a cowed and sullen air; and, without saying a word, he led the way through the forest, taking the path we have mentioned which led direct to the charcoal-burners' haunt.

"Don't you attempt to bolt," said Jack, warningly. "It'll be the worst for you if you do; I'm just in the humor to warm you again."

But Hunston was not in the humor to do so.

His heart was full of anger and hate; but he was bruised, bleeding and in pain.

For the time at least he was thoroughly beaten.

What his thoughts were the reader can imagine.

Shame was mingled with fear, and his mind was torn with conflicting emotions.

The walk was not long.

Night now fell fast, and it was difficult to make progress.

So much so that they all felt a sense of relief when a bright glare brought them in sight of the charcoal-burners' haunt.

It was a wild, weird scene.

They had chosen an open space in the heart of the forest, on one side was a hut, in which they slept and had their meals.

It was composed of stakes driven in the ground, between which branches were twined. Outside of this, again, were walls of turf, and the roof was thatched with straw.

The charcoal was smoldering in heaps, and the men were sitting round the fire, smoking their pipes, and drinking something out of a bottle.

"Now," said Jack, "which is the man who robbed you?"

"Both of them," answered Hunston.

Harvey, holding Maple by the collar of his jacket, as if he were a policeman, stood in the background.

"I say, my men," cried Jack.

"Servant, sir; what is it?" answered one of the men, respectfully.

"This young gentleman says you have robbed him of two pounds ten. Is this true?"

"Lord love you, sir, we never robbed anyone in our lives. We're poor chaps, but honest, and gets our livin' a burnin' this charcoal stuff."

"Have you seen him before?"

"Who?"

"This person before me," said Jack.

"Yes, this afternoon. He said about an hour ago he'd lost himself in the wood. We told him which way to go, and my mate 'ere begged a pipe o' baccy, which he gave him."

"In that case," said Jack to Hunston, senior, "you have told Maple a lie. Hand out the money or I'll make you."

Reluctantly Hunston put his hand in his pocket and produced two pound ten.

"It's all I've got," he said. "There it is, just as Maple gave it me."

"Then you admit that your saying that I stole the money from the desk was a conspiracy between Maple and you?"

"Yes."

"The money was never taken at all by anybody?"

"No."

"Will you repeat this to Mr. Crawcour?" pursued Jack.

"You can. I shan't deny it, now I'm bowled out."

"It doesn't matter much. These men have heard your confession," Jack replied, triumphantly, adding,

"What a lying, deceitful, wretched thief you must be! You are not content with telling falsehoods about me, but you must even rob your friend."

"Jack," said a voice in the rear.

It was Maple.

"Well, what do you want?" answered Jack, turning round.

"Give me my money, will you?"

"Not a halfpenny of it," Jack answered, firmly.

"I'll tell the principal if you stick to it," observed Maple.

"You may tell him what I did with it, and I think the whole school will say I acted very properly," Jack answered.

"What is that. You've got it now."

"Look here, my man," continued Jack, to the foremost charcoal-burner, who remained standing respectfully before him.

"What's your name?"

"Sam Adams, sir," answered the man.

"And your companion's?"

"Bill Simson."

"Are you married?"

"Yes, sir; both of us."

"And got families?"

"I've got ten, and Bill's got twelve, and he's expectin' another on 'em shortly, though what to do to pay the doctor he don't know," replied Adams.

"I suppose five-and-twenty shillings a-piece for you would be acceptable."

"Bless your young heart!" the man exclaimed, as the

tears of emotion stood in his eyes. "It would be a fortune to us; we don't often make as much as that in a fortnight, we don't."

"Take this money," exclaimed Jack, handing it to Sam Adams. "Divide it between you. No questions will be asked. Never mind what that whining cur says to the contrary."

He pointed to Maple.

"You've no right to give away my money," he said, tearfully. "It's a beastly shame, and Mr. Crawcour will make you give it me back again."

"Will he? I don't think he will. However, I'll take my chance about that. Think that you have done an act of charity, and that the money is of more use as I have disposed of it than it ever would have been in your dirty hands."

"I suppose it's all right, sir," said Adams.

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. My name is Harkaway Bedington, and I'm the son of a gentleman near here," replied Jack.

"What, the gentleman that's come to live to Willow Copse Hall, along of Lady Mordenfield, who was his wife all along, or something? I don't quite know what it is, but I heard a talk of something down at the 'Three Brewers,' on Saturday night. Why, sir, he's taken my son on to work in the stables, and a werry nice gentleman he be."

"That's all right. Now thank this boy for his present. I'm only the agent in the matter, Maple."

"Yes, Jack."

"Go and shake them by the hand. Don't hang back; their hands are honest, my lad, and that's more than yours are. Tell them how glad you are to be of use to them, and say you hope the money will do them and their families good."

Maple hesitated.

"What, you won't, you obstinate young beggar! Where is my persuader?"

"Jack picked up the switch he had cut to beat Hunston, senior, with, and which he allowed to fall from his hand, and shook it over Maple's back."

"Oh! don't Jack—don't, please don't! I'll say anything you like, only don't hit me!" screamed Maple.

"Cut along, then, and look sharp."

"Maple went to the charcoal-burners and shook their hands timidly."

"Say what I told you!" cried Jack, in an authoritative voice.

"I hope you will be benefited by the money I gave you, and that it will do you and your family good," he said.

"That's it; now you and Hunston may go. Slope away—hook it—do you hear!" exclaimed Jack.

"Won't you come with us?" asked Harry Hunston.

"Come with you? Not I!" replied Jack, with intense scorn. "I wouldn't be seen at a dog fight with either of you. See how you've treated me; I don't like such contemptible humbugs. Be off!"

"Which is the way?"

"Find out."

"But suppose I can't."

"Then sleep in the wood. They kicked you out of the quarterdeck, and if you're not good enough for the navy, I'm sure your society is not good enough for me. Don't stand there, unless you want to have it hotter than you have had it already; that's all I've got to say."

Smothering something which sounded very like a naughty exclamation, Harry Hunston shrugged his shoulders and bent his back, as he always did when he was annoyed, and, making for the little path, strode into the mazes of the wood.

Maple ran after him, receiving a sharp cut from Jack's switch as he went.

"Wait for me, Hunston!" he cried, in piteous accents. "Oh, do please wait; I shall be lost in the wood, and then I shall die of fright; I know I shall! Oh, do, do, wait!"

Presently the sound of his voice died away and they were both lost to sight.

"Now," said Jack, "I think it is about time for us to think of making tracks. What do you say, Dick?"

Harvey, for whom this remark was addressed, replied in the affirmative.

"It gets dark at five, and it's been dark a full hour, sir," exclaimed Sam Adams, the charcoal-burner. "I ain't got no watch, but I can guess the time pretty well."

"It's jolly dark, too," observed Jack.

"The moon'll be up about ten, sir. Would you like to stop w' us till then? I've got some beer in a bottle; my mate can sing, and we could get up a bit of a blarney."

"No, thank you; we should be missed," answered Jack; "much obliged all the same to you, my friend. I've made a mistake in coming into the wood at all, though I'm glad of it for one thing."

"Bowling out Hunston," said Harvey.

"Exactly; but I think we'll hook it."

"You are welcome to stop if you will, sir. But if not, thank 'ee for me," exclaimed Adams.

Jack extended his hand, and did not disdain a drop of beer when it was proffered him, as he was thirsty after his long run.

They took leave of their friends, the charcoal-burners, with many exclamations of gratitude on the part of the latter, and receiving instructions which way to go, they struck out in the dark forest.

Black enough it was in that dense wood in all conscience.

They could scarcely see their hands before their faces.

Jack's pluck was a little in excess of his prudence, or he would have got one of the charcoal-burners to show him the way to the open. However he neglected the opportunity and did not accept Adam's offer, which the latter bawled out after him as an after-thought.

"It's all right," he shouted. "We can find our way, thank you. Good night!"

"Good night, sir, and many of them, thank you, for us," answered Sam Adams.

They followed the path for some time, but at length

contrived to miss it, and went floundering about in a dense growth of underwood and trees.

It was excusable in the dark, for the path, such as it was, was not so big or clear as a sheep track.

The brambles tore their clothes, and the overlapping twigs hit them in the face in an irritating manner.

A last Jack, who was leading the way, came to a halt.

"I say, Dick," he exclaimed; "it is a case."

"A case of what?" asked Harvey.

"Case of stump. I'll be jiggered if I know where we are."

"Then we're in for a night of it."

"Right you are, hollow tree—bed of moss—babes in the wood, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't like doing the Robinson Crusoe dodge, but if we're in for it, it's no use making any bones about it," said Harvey, dismally.

"Not a bit; we've got to camp, and it's no good crying."

"I wonder where Hunston and Maple are?"

"I think the same as we are, and hope," replied Jack, "Maple will have a fit."

"What's the odds to us? Those fellows deserve all they get, and a precious sight more. I've no pity to spare for them; all I've got I want for myself. It's cold and chilly, and to tell you the truth I could do with a bit of grub; I'm peckish."

"Look what a run we had," replied Harvey. "I have pelted along full tilt, and I could eat a horse."

"I'd rather have a cow for choice," said Jack, laughing; "or a bit of cow—say a sirloin of beef, with plenty of horseradish and mustard."

"Don't!" exclaimed Harvey; "you make my mouth water."

"Be a Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Jews, and treat yourself to a salad."

"If I can find one."

"Seriously," said Jack, "what are we to do?"

"Blest if I know!" replied Harvey.

Suddenly they heard just over their heads, "Oo, oo, so, oo!"

"What's that?" said Harvey, shrinking back. "I say," he added, "no tricks upon travelers."

Jack laughed.

"It's an old owl, you fool!" he exclaimed. "Have you never heard an owl before? and it's a good thing we have heard him. Owls generally roost in hollow trees, and we may find a shelter. We can't build a log house, because we have neither logs nor tools, and we can't wrap ourselves in our blankets like the men we read of in books of foreign travels, because our blankets are on our beds."

"I thought it was some tramp going to rob or murder us," replied Harvey. "What an unearthly sound it was! I'm glad we are in England, where there are no wild beasts or snakes."

"I hate snakes!" Jack remarked. "I'd rather face a tiger ever so much. I'm as tired as a dog, and can't go any further. We're in for a night of it!"

"That's about the size of it," replied Harvey, who did not seem to relish the prospects at all.

Jack groped his way to the tree from which the owl hooted, and to his delight found that it was hollow, having a large aperture into which he could easily squeeze himself.

"Here's a slice of luck!" he cried. "The tree's hollow!"

"Where are you?" asked Harvey.

"Inside," replied Jack, in a hollow voice.

"I've heard of being up a tree, but never of being inside one," Harvey said, laughing, and he, too, groped his way into the tree, which had a hollow trunk just big enough to hold them both.

Its shelter kept them warm and prevented them feeling the cold wind which blew without.

"It's snug," Jack remarked, "if it isn't roomy; and if we only had some grub we should be as right as the mail."

"At all events," Harvey replied, "it is better than running about the forest in the dark; that was awful! Don't you feel happy at finding out these fellows, Jack?"

Jack rather thought he did.

"What will Mr. Crawcour do with them?"

"He ought to serve Maple as he served me, and as for Hunston, senior, he's a disgrace to the school, and ought to be kicked out of it."

"I should tell him so."

"Don't alarm yourself. I shall, and make no bones of it," replied Jack. "I'm not afraid of a live lion stuffed with straw."

"I heard Hunston, junior, say that his father paid something extra for his brother, or the chief would not have had him at all."

"Very likely. Hullo, what's that?" exclaimed Jack. They listened and heard a shouting at a distance. Some one was crying out at the top of his voice.

"Hullo! hi! hi! Hullo! hullo!"

"Some one after us," said Jack. "Like my luck. When I am comfortable for the night I don't approve of interruption."

"I suppose others beside ourselves are lost, and the fellows who followed us have told Mr. Crawcour that they lost the trail in the wood and people have been sent after us," said Harvey.

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Jack.

"Hullo! hullo!" again arose the cry.

"Shall I fog them?" said Jack.

"How?" asked Harvey.

"You know I can ventriloquize."

"Oh, I see; do. Suppose it's the governor himself! What a lark it will be! They'll be cutting about in all directions, and you can say it's a deceptive echo."

"A very deceptive echo," answered Jack. "However, I'll have a go in at them. See if I don't give 'em fits."

Jack stepped out of the owl's nest, and Harvey stayed inside, because he rather liked his comfortable quarters.

"Hi, hi, hi!" said a voice, which Jack recognized as Mr. Mole's.

"Hi!" answered Jack, throwing his voice before him.

"Where are you?" asked Mr. Mole.

"This way. More to the right."

"Why do you say to the right?" asked Harvey.

"Because I noticed a little pond, as we came along, where the pheasants drink, answered Jack, and I want him to go a cropper into it."

There was silence for a brief space.

"Hi, hi!" again said the senior master. "It's dark here, and I can't see the stars. It's muddy, too. Is it all right? Hi, hi!"

"Hi, hi!" replied Jack. "All right. Safe as a house. Come on, sir."

"Who is it?"

"Harkaway."

There was a short silence again, but it was soon broken by lugubrious cries from Mr. Mole, who shouted:

"Help, help! Harkaway, where are you?"

"Up a tree, sir."

"A what?"

"A tree, sir. A gum tree."

"Help me out of this, will you? I'm in a pond up to my middle, and the mud sticks so. I've lost my right boot. Oh, my, what shall I do? There, the left boot gone now."

Mr. Mole spoke in a plaintive tone.

"Jack threw his voice into a remote part of the wood, saying, faintly:

"Where are you, sir? I've lost you. Speak again."

"Hi, hi!" answered Mr. Mole, floundering out of the mud as well as he could.

"Dence take the boy! I wish they'd come up with the lantern."

As he spoke, Mr. Crawcour, Mr. Pumbleton and Mr. Bolivant came up, Mr. Stoner being left at home to keep the boys in order.

The only ones who were lost were Hunston, senior, Maple, Jack and Harvey. These were unaccounted for; and hearing that the boys who returned from the paper chase had very nearly been lost in the wood, the principal sent down to the "Crown" for a chaise, and drove over with all the masters he could spare.

"Ha!" cried Mr. Bolivant. "Jack o'Lantern in ze swamp, ha, ha, ha!"

The light enabled Mr. Mole to flounder out of the mud and gain firm ground again.

As may be imagined, he was not in the best of tempers.

Going up to M. Bolivant, he said:

"What do you mean, Monsieur, by gibing at me?"

"I not gibe. What is gibe? I only laugh. So—ha, ha! ven I see you in ze mod," answered M. Bolivant.

"Perhaps you won't laugh when you see yourself there," exclaimed Mr. Mole, giving him a push which sent him backward into the pond.

"Mr. Mole, this violence—" began the principal.

It's excusable under the circumstances, sir," replied Mr. Mole. "This infernal—I beg your pardon—this Frenchman has mocked me before now, and I will not be mocked by any man living."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said a voice close by.

"He's at it again," cried Mr. Mole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll knock him down," Mr. Mole continued, furiously.

M. Bolivant extricated himself from the mud and water, and came out dripping like a rat.

"Vot does he say?" he exclaimed. "I no speak a vord—not von leetle vord. He strike me! he push me in ze mod. I am a Frenchman, and ze blood of ze Bolivants not stand it."

"Frogs."

The word seemed to come from Mr. Mole's very lips; and Mr. Crawcour, putting aside the French master, stood between the two.

"That's a little too bad, Mr. Mole," he exclaimed. "I heard you say 'Frogs.'"

"Nothing of the kind, sir. I deny it," exclaimed the senior master.

"Don't deny it, because I heard you."

"It's—it's a—"

"Chain ze English beast up!"

This time it seemed to be M. Bolivant who spoke.

"Monsieur," exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, "I must really beg of you to be temperate."

"Shut up!"

"Mr. Pumbleton, did you speak?" cried the principal, turning sharply round.

"No, sir."

"It was your voice. This is disgraceful. What am I to understand by such conduct? I did not expect this from my staff."

"Mr. Mole has grossly insulted me, and I demand ze satisfaction of a gentleman, or I vill make him know ze reason why, as you say in your wretched country," replied M. Bolivant.

"The injury is on my side," said Mr. Mole.

"I too am implicated in this matter, without rhyme or reason," remarked Mr. Pumbleton.

"Go it ye cripples! crutches are cheap! Ha, ha!"

Those dreadful words were put into the mouth of Mr. Crawcour himself.

The principal of Pomona House stood aghast at the sound of them.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we are the sport of some delusion—some spirit of the wood."

"Ho! ho! ho!" sounded wildly and weirdly close to him.

They all started.

"Ah, I have eet!" exclaimed M. Bolivant. "It ees that Jack Harkaway. He play tricks with his voice. Ve are made what you call ze saeres fools of."

"That's it," said Mr. Crawcour. "It's that Harkaway! What a stupid to be sure I was not to think of it before!"

"Of course it is," answered Mr. Mole.

"I'd dust his jacket," observed Mr. Pumbleton, savagely.

"Gentlemen, be reconciled," said the principal.

"Mr. Mole," answered M. Bolivant, "I have always ze great respect for you; to-night you push me into ze pond. I am covered with mud. I have ze taste of ze fish in my mouth, but I forgive you."

"A la bonne heure," replied the Frenchman, shaking his hands with characteristic good nature.

Harkaway and Harvey now deemed it prudent to emerge from their hiding-place, which they did, and guided by the light of the lanterns carried by the masters they quickly discovered their whereabouts.

Mr. Crawcour had lost all patience with Jack, and he no sooner saw him than he seized him by the collar and shook him heartily.

"Look what you have done!" he exclaimed.

"What, sir?"

"Behold Mr. Mole and M. Bolivant; do you see what a plight they are in?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir," Jack answered in a penitent tone.

"I believe you have no organ of veneration. Is this your respect for your teachers?"

"He is one little scamp," said M. Bolivant, shaking his fist in his face.

When the principal had done shaking him, Mr. Mole began, and shook him so thoroughly that Jack gasped for breath and began to kick.

"Oh, my shins," cried the senior master, "the little clodhopper's boots are like iron."

"Turn it up then," replied Jack; "I can't stand too much of it. You'll shake my inside out; drop it."

"I'll owe it you," replied Mr. Mole with a vindictive grin.

"It'll keep it sir," replied Jack.

Now, gentlemen, let us retrace our steps to our gig. The boys can get into the boot or run behind, whichever they like," said Mr. Crawcour.

"En route," said the French master.

The party began to make for the highroad, where they had left the gig in charge of a countryman, who for a consideration was holding the horse.

Not caring about a six-mile run home, Jack decided upon going in the boat, and he and Harvey were accordingly put inside, Hunston and Maple having been previously dispatched on foot.

The boys were closely packed—something like herrings in a barrel.

But, being tired and hungry, they were pleased at the prospect of supper, and did not complain.

Pomona House was reached in time.

The senior master and M. Bolivant changed their clothes, as did Jack and his companions, who had warm baths.

A hot supper was served to the masters, which Jack and Harvey were graciously asked to join, in consideration of their fatigue.

They were asked how it was they came to lose themselves, and Jack gave a vivid account of the adventure, telling all about his exposure of Hunston, senior, and Maple, and the disposition of the latter's money.

When the masters heard this, they were loud in their expressions of regret at what had happened after Jack's being found guilty of the supposed theft, when he was really innocent.

"I'll make an example of those two boys the first thing to-morrow morning!" exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, indignantly.

"Hunston, senior, is too big to flog," remarked Mr. Mole.

"I'd flog him, sir, if he were as big as a house. I can make no distinction; he has behaved in a mean, rascally and cowardly manner. But how was it, Harkaway, that you did not clear yourself, when you knew you were the victim of a conspiracy?"

"I don't mind telling you now in confidence, sir," answered Jack. "My old playfellow, Emily Scratchley, sent me her savings, amounting to two pounds ten."

"They will tell you at the post-office that I cashed an order for that amount on the day of the charge against me."

"But Emily begged that I would not say a word to any one, as her father, who is very close, would perhaps beat her, and I did not say anything, as you know."

"And you put up with the indignity of being called a thief?"

"I knew it would all come out some day, sir, and then you would none of you think the worse of me. Wickedness like that of Harry Hunston and Maple never prospers."

"Right, it never does," replied Mr. Crawcour. "I owe you an apology for whipping you when you did not deserve it, and I will let you off the next time you do."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, making a note of this promise, and determined to do something outrageous before long.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"You can give me some more of that boiled rabbit, and plenty of onion sauce, sir, as well as a good thick slice of pork. I'm uncommonly fond of rabbit, and I feel rather sharp-set after wandering in the wood."

Mr. Crawcour smiled at Jack's unabashed impudence. He rather liked it, though. The boy was open and straightforward, and he had his good qualities.

"M. Bolivant patted Jack on the head, saying:

"He was one fine fellow, this Jack Harkaway."

"Paws off, Pompey," said Jack, moving on one side.

The French master grinned, and the boys retired to get ready for prayers.

"I've had a rattling good supper," observed Jack to Harvey. "Sort of a regular buster, and I feel as happy as a king."

"Won't Hunston, senior, and Maple catch it?" replied Harvey.

"Rather, and serve them right, too."

When they entered the school-room everyone crowded round them.

"You're a nice couple of fellows to lead us into the woods," exclaimed Collinson.

"We got the worst of it," answered Jack.

"It spoilt the chase."

"It wasn't bad fun, though, after all. I led the masters such a dance."

"Tell us, Jack. Tell us all about it," exclaimed half a dozen voices. Jack recounted the adventure, much to every one's delight, and had scarcely finished before Mr

Crawcour entered at a side door and mounted his desk to read prayers."

CHAPTER VII.

UGLY BOB.

MR. CRAWCOUR said nothing that night about the discovery he had made respecting Jack's innocence, and the confederates were on thorns to know what course Jack had adopted.

Hunston, senior, scarcely slept at all during the night; he was drowned with rage and shame. To be pointed out to the whole school as a villain base enough to take away a boy's character because he hated him, was a terrible anticipation.

At length, worn out with fatigue, he fell into an uneasy slumber, soon to be roused by the ringing of the bell which sounded at seven every morning for the pupils to dress and come down to school.

Mr. Crawcour never made his appearance at early school.

Breakfast took place at nine, and afterward half an hour was allowed for recreation, so that school began again at ten and continued till twelve, when the boys had two hours to themselves, dinner being ready at two o'clock, and work recommenced at three.

The principal was at his place when the boys trooped into the school-room to the ringing of the great bell at ten.

Mr. Mole stood by his side, holding in his hand the dreaded birch.

"What's up now?" said Collinson to Jackson.

"Can't tell," replied the latter, though it looks as if somebody was going to be swiped."

"Silence!" exclaimed the principal, raising his hand.

In an instant every voice was hushed, and you might have heard a pin drop.

"I have a very agreeable, and at the same time a very painful duty to perform," began Mr. Crawcour. "Agreeable, because I am enabled to do tardy justice to a boy who has been wrongly suspected and punished for a fault which he never committed, and painful because I am compelled to publish the lasting infamy of two boys whom it is a disgrace to have among us. Harkaway Bedington, as you are all aware, was publicly punished in the most severe manner I could adopt for stealing two pounds ten, belonging to Maple. I am in a position to prove that money was never stolen at all, but that Maple conspired with Hunston, senior, to fix this charge upon your friend, Harkaway, in order to blacken his character, and bring him into disrepute with both masters and companions, to gratify some private grudge they had against him."

Loud murmurs of astonishment arose.

"Order!" cried Mr. Crawcour.

And again all was still.

"I am now about to punish the guilty," continued Mr. Crawcour. "Hunston, senior, stand forward."

"What for?" demanded Hunston, assuming an attitude of defiance.

"As Harkaway Bedington was punished, so shall you be."

"That's all nonsense," said Hunston, senior, with a laugh. "You forget that I am a young man, and cannot be birched like a boy."

"While you remain one of my pupils you must conform to my rules and subject yourself to proper discipline," returned Mr. Crawcour.

"Then I cease to be one of your pupils from this moment. I shall go home."

The principal looked surprised.

"Don't attempt to stop me, any of you," exclaimed Hunston, senior, grasping a ruler. "I've knocked a man down before now with a belying-pin, on board ship, and I shan't be too particular now. I'm not going to allow myself to be performed upon, don't make any mistake."

He rose and took his hat down from a peg and put it on with a jerk.

Then he moved toward the door.

No one attempted to stop him.

"Go, bold and bad boy," said Mr. Crawcour, in a most severe tone. "You are a moral pestilence, and the school will be purified at your departure."

The door shut with a bang.

Hunston, senior, was gone.

Without betraying any disappointment, Mr. Crawcour called up Maple, who advanced, trembling.

Two masters seized him, and presently his howls were mingled with the hissing sound of the birch as it descended through the air.

At length it was over.

Maple was wriggling and crying back to his seat.

"Boys," exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, "I shall give you a holiday in honor of Harkaway's vindicated innocence. There will be no work to-day."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the boys, who all rushed pell-mell out of the school-room.

Jack's friends shook his hand heartily, and he was once more the popular favorite, overwhelmed with congratulations.

Hunston, senior, went to the "Crown," where he was well known, and sent up to Pomona House for his box, going home that afternoon.

Every one thought they had seen the last of him, but they were mistaken, as will be found out presently.

Mr. Bedington was informed by a letter from Mr. Crawcour of what had happened, and he marked his sense of Jack's conduct by sending him a handsome new gold watch and chain, which was the envy of all his companions.

Jack was now once more at the top of the tree.

Three weeks passed very pleasantly, and nothing of any consequence occurred, except that Jack was put in the school football eleven, and by his brilliant play contrived to win the game in a match between the boys of Pomona House and an eleven from Hertford.

One day he was walking in Lillie Bridge, having paid a brief visit to his favorite pastrycook's.

To his surprise he ran up against Hunston, senior, who, with his hands in the pocket of a pilot coat, was smoking a short black pipe, and strolling along as if all the town belonged to him.

"Hunston!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, I'm the man, alive and kicking, as they say," replied Harry Hunston, coolly. "Didn't you know I was here?"

"No."

"I'm at Dr. Begbie's. Crawcour wouldn't have me, and I thought I'd try t'other crib, which I like a precious deal better."

"What a strange thing!" Jack exclaimed.

"I don't see anything at all strange about it," Hunston said. "I've got a right to go where I like if I pay for it, haven't I?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, tip us your fist. You're not above shaking hands with a fellow, are you?"

Jack hung back.

Somehow or other his instinct made him distrust Hunston, senior, who had always been his enemy.

"It was through you I got the dirty kick out from Crawcour's, but I don't bear malice," Hunston went on.

"I can't see that it was my fault," replied Jack.

"It was in reality all Maple's doings. He put me up to the dodge, but I'm sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. I can't say more than that, can I?"

Won by this affection of frankness, Jack took his proffered hand.

"Consider that I've made you a handsome apology; let's be friends," and now suppose we have a beer at the 'Crown,' and drink to our noble selves."

"All right," replied Jack, whose great fault was his easy, good-natured way.

Hunston slipped his arm in that of Jack's, and they walked to the "Crown."

Shortly afterward they passed Collinson, who was going to the stationer's.

He stared hard at Hunston, senior, and looked both grieved and puzzled to see Jack with him.

"He's too proud to speak," remarked Hunston, senior, as Collinson went on. "It's his loss, however, not mine. By the way, how's my pup of a brother? Tell him to come down to Begbie's and see me."

"I will," replied Jack.

They entered the "Crown," which was an old-fashioned hostelry of some consequence in the posting day, and had two glasses of bitter beer in front of the bar.

A flashily-dressed man was standing by, wearing a profusion of jewelry, which did not look real.

Near him was another man of the same dissipated appearance.

They had two dogs with them, and accosted Hunston familiarly.

"Who are those fellows?" whispered Jack.

"One we call Ugly Bob, and the other is known as the 'Brum,' because he hails from Birmingham. I'll introduce you," said Hunston.

"What are they?"

"Sporting men."

"What do they do for a living, I mean?" cried Jack.

"Oh, bet on races. Get up pigeon-shooting matches, dog-fights and billiard matches, and all that sort of thing; they're two stunnors. I say, Bob, here's a friend of mine anxious to make your acquaintance, and you too," he added, addressing the Brum.

The men shook hands with Jack, and proposed, as it was cold out there, they should go to the billiard-room fire.

Jack followed them, scarcely knowing whether he was doing right or wrong in mixing with such peculiar people, but his suspicions vanished almost as soon as they were formed.

"Suppose we have a game at billiards?" said Ugly Bob, adding, as he looked at Jack, "Play, sir?"

"I know a cannon counts two, and a white ball pocketed is also two, and that anything off the red is three; and I can make a bridge and knock the balls about a little; but I can't play," replied Jack.

"No more can I," answered Ugly Bob. When I play it is for amusement, like. But I've no objection to play you twenty points up, and I give you five, for half a crown."

"Play him. He's the biggest duffer I know," whispered Hunston, senior.

"I thought you said he was a sporting man."

"Ah, but he knows nothing about billiards. It's horses he's so big upon. Don't bet with him," answered Hunston, senior, with a significant shake of his head.

The Brum took up a position near the board and said he would mark.

Jack, against his will, began to play.

The balls run very easily and luckily for him, and, by the aid of a few flukes, he won the game.

Ugly Bob handed him a half-a-crown, saying:

"So help me never! you're pretty good for one who doesn't play."

"He's one too many for you, Bob," said the Brum.

"I'll try him again. Never say die."

Hunston patted Jack on the back, and exclaimed:

"What do you say to my novice? Isn't he a beauty?"

"Reg'lar lamb," answered the Brum, rapturously. "I mean a wonderful good 'un to play."

Jack did not see the connection between a good player and a lamb, as he was not aware that young sheep indulged in the pastime of billiards, nor did he see the exquisitely comic grimace with which that intelligent countryman, the Brum, favored him behind his back.

Flushed with success, and fully believing, in the innocence of his heart, that he could beat Ugly Bob on his merits, he felt no reluctance in playing him again, and this time for a larger stake.

As a matter of course he won.

Ugly Bob growled a little, and was advised by his friend to leave off.

"I tell you he's too good for you," said the Brum.

"If you are wise, you will turn it up before you drop any more coin."

"I shan't. I've lost a pound. It ain't much, and I'll stake another pound and my watch and chain against his watch and chain; and mine's the heaviest by far. I gave thirty-five guineas for the two in London last year."

"Go it," said Hunston, senior. "I say, Jack, I'll give you thirty for them if you win."

"I don't know," replied Jack. "I think I ought to leave off now."

"What! without giving the man his revenge!"

"It's nearly time to go."

"After winning his money, too," continued Hunston.

"Oh, if the gentleman likes to behave shabby, the money's of no account. There's more where that came from," said Ugly Bob.

"By the rules of the game, you're entitled to your revenge," observed the Brum. "That's law," he added, emphatically.

"It's only twenty minutes past one," Hunston exclaimed, "and you're not due at dinner till two. You can run home easy in a quarter of an hour. I've done it myself scores of times; so that excuse won't hold water, my beauty. But still, if you want to go, don't let me persuade you to stay, only I shall be obliged if you will not play any more with my friends."

"If I ought—" began Jack.

"I'll have a spar with you, Bob, interrupted Hunston, almost rudely, taking no notice of Jack's exclamation.

"Did the gentleman speak?" observed Bob.

"I was about to say that I will play you," replied Jack, his face burning painfully.

"Right you are. I'm agreeable. You're kind, and I'm grateful. Twenty up to save time, and I give you five. It's odds against me, but no matter. 'Be jolly,' is my motto."

"I'll hold the stakes," said Hunston, senior.

Ugly Bob handed him a sovereign, and his watch and chain.

Jack did the same, though he felt an aching at the heart when he took his beautiful watch out of his pocket, and thought how wrong it was to risk the loss of his father's valuable gift.

Drinking a glass of brandy neat, Ugly Bob exclaimed: "I'm in form now. I feel fit to play for a man's life. A dollar I win him."

"It's a pound to a pinch of snuff," remarked the Brum, "if he's in form. If he says he's fit, I'll back him."

Jack began to tremble, and his nervousness increased as Ugly Bob led off with a break of ten.

"I'll bet on Harkaway," said Hunston.

"Done with you for a fiver," exclaimed the Brum.

"Now, Jack, my boy, look out. You are not playing well this game. Your hand shakes. This won't do. Have a nerver. A little brandy will liven you up," continued Hunston, senior.

Jack shook his head, and made a miss.

"Eleven, five, that's the game," exclaimed the Brum.

Ugly Bob now muttered something about "putting the poor beggar out of his misery," and scored very rapidly the remaining points necessary to win the game."

"Didn't give him a smell," remarked the Brum. "I knew how it would be."

"Hand over," said Ugly Bob, taking the watches as a matter of course, and pocketing them, together with the money.

Suddenly a light broke upon Jack, who thought it very odd that Ugly Bob should play so badly at first and so very well all at once afterward.

"It's my belief," he said, with his usual impulsiveness, "that I've been swindled."

"What?" said Ugly Bob, striding up to him.

"Well I never did," remarked the Brum. "The young gent wants to say that he's been had, when it was all as fair as fair could be. Says he's been done. Well, if that don't lick cock-fighting. It was as square a match as ever I see, but that's how they always goes on when they loses."

"Look here," exclaimed Hunston, senior. "I won't have my friends insulted."

"But they've got my watch," answered Jack.

"Wouldn't you have kept mine if you'd won it?" asked Ugly Bob.

"No; I had made up my mind to give it you back."

"More flat you, then," replied Ugly Bob, with a grin of contempt.

"It's like your impertinence," continued Hunston, senior, "to talk about being swindled. You've lost your watch, and I'm jolly glad of it, because I hate you."

Now Harry Hunston's real sentiments were appearing.

"You brought me here under the guise of friendship, so that I might be cheated!" exclaimed Jack.

"Punch his head, Bob," said Hunston.

"Right, sir," replied Ugly Bob.

And before Jack properly realized what had happened to him he was standing in the road outside the "Crown," with a black eye, a loose tooth, and nose which was bleeding.

All of which favors Ugly Bob had conferred upon him in the brief space of one minute.

It was useless to attempt to go back to the billiard-room.

That course would only be to subject himself to a fresh attack.

So with Hunston, senior's, jeering laugh ringing in his ears, he wended his way back slowly and mournfully to Pomona House.

He saw how shamefully he had been treated and tricked.

It was all a trap of Hunston, senior's, to get him into the billiard room, so that he might lose everything valuable he had about him.

His friendship was a sham and a pretense.

He was not a man to forgive an enemy.

Jack's triumph over him rankled in his mind.

He had not forgotten the affair in Black Adder Wood.

Jack did not like to say anything about his loss to the boys, for fear of being chaffed, and he was still more reluctant to speak to the master.

What should he do?

He leaned against a tree which grew by the side of the road and reflected.

A couple of minutes were passed by him in great perplexity.

Then he heard his name called.

It was Collinson, who was hurrying home from Lillie Bridge to be in time for dinner.

"Been in the wars, eh?" he exclaimed. "How's that? But I needn't ask, since I saw you with Hunston, senior, who, I find, is at Begbie's; a nice young man for a small tea-party that is; and now, Master Harkaway, walk along by my side, and tell me how you came to fall in and sham with one who tried to do you a very grave injury."

"I am very glad I met you," answered Jack, "very glad indeed, Collinson, for I am just out of my mind."

"A pleasant state of things! But out with it."

Jack hesitated no longer, and faithfully recounted to Collinson all that had taken place.

"The low scoundrel!" exclaimed Collinson, indignantly. "But it's just like him, and I am not a bit surprised—not a bit. It only serves you right for being too good-natured. Don't you understand that we cannot get on in this world if we are unable to say 'No'? That little word, judiciously uttered, often saves us from a deal of worry and trouble."

"I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't for the watch," said Jack. "My father, you know, is very kind, but strict also, and he has a horror of my being in any way fast. What he would say if he knew I had in so foolish a manner gambled away his handsome present, I cannot imagine. Isn't it a case for the police?"

"I am inclined to think it is," rejoined Collinson. "But leave it to me till after dinner; I'll get leave from Mr. Crawcour to go to Lillie Bridge this afternoon, and we will see if we cannot give Mr. Hunston and his pleasant companions, Ugly Bob and the Brum, a dressing they little expect."

"Thank you a thousand times," said Jack, warmly. "If you can only get me out of this scrape, I'll never be so foolish again—never, never."

"I'll do my best. Are you satisfied with that promise?" Collinson replied, with his pleasant smile.

"Quite," Jack answered, gratefully.

The bell was just ringing for dinner as they entered the school-yard, and Jack washed his face, which was not so much swollen as he had expected.

He buttoned up his jacket, so that the loss of his watch would not be noticed, and sat as near the bottom of the table as he could get, in order to avoid observation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOOT-BALL MATCH.

MR. CRAWCOUR readily gave Collinson leave to go into the town instead of attending school, when he heard why he wished to go.

"You are acting very wisely in Harkaway's behalf," he said. "I never heard of a more infamous transaction. Why, it's rank swindling. The boy was foolish, but they had not any right to take advantage of his inexperience."

"You don't blame Harkaway, sir," said Collinson.

"Not much. If you take my advice you will go at once to Dr. Begbie. We are rivals in the scholastic line, but I have always heard him spoken of as a high-spirited gentleman and a good scholar. He surely will not tolerate such conduct in any pupil of his."

"I should think not, sir; and I am obliged to you for the hint. I did intend to go to the police-station, but I will go to the doctor first."

"Do so, and let me know the result of your interview as soon as you return. These men must give up their spoil, or be punished for their shameful behavior."

Collinson thanked the principal, who added that he left the matter entirely in his hands, and he went at once to Doctor Begbie's.

It was nearly tea-time when he returned, and Jack had passed an uneasy, restless time of it during his absence.

He wondered if he would be successful in getting back his watch or not.

Collinson, however, returned and handed his watch and chain.

Jack was too much overcome to speak.

"I do not deserve this!" he exclaimed. "How did you get it?"

"I had some difficulty," replied Collinson. "But I did it, and I will tell you how. I went straight to Dr. Begbie, who saw me, and behaved, I must say, in the most handsome manner. When he heard my story he declared that he was shocked, and he sent for Hunston, senior."

"What did he say?"

"He heard the accusation against him and replied that the men, of whom he knew nothing, had, in his opinion, won the watch fairly. The doctor retorted by saying that it was a cheat from beginning to end, and that he looked upon Hunston as an accomplice and should at once send for a policeman."

"Did he?" asked Jack.

"No. Hunston turned pale, and at last consented to go to the 'Crown,' where the men were, with the doctor and myself, and see if he couldn't get the watch restored. So we went down together, and found the men, who were in the bar. We told the landlord he would probably lose his license for allowing such characters in his house, and he prevented them from running away. We threatened them with the police; they then gave up the watch and chain; had they not done so, we should certainly have given them in charge."

"Capital," said Jack. "Didn't Harry Hunston look small?"

"He did, and sneaked away with his tail between his legs, as we say of a dog. Dr. Begbie assured me he was very sorry that any boy of his should lend himself to such a discreditable transaction, and regretted that the victim was one of our boys. He said further that he was very anxious to establish a friendly feeling between the schools, and should be happy if you would accept a challenge to play at football."

"Did you accept it?"

"Yes. I said I was captain of the Pomona House eleven, and that we would play his fellows in our field this day week."

"Bravo! I say, Collinson, you're a stunner," cried Jack, delightedly. "You'll put me in the eleven!"

"Certainly."

"May I tell the fellows?"

Jack thanked him again and again for his kindness to him, and vowed that the affair of that day would be a lesson to him for life, and that he would never more go into a billiard room.

The news that Begbie wanted to play Crawcour's at football flew through the school, and when it was known that a match was actually arranged the enthusiasm knew no bounds.

Those who were likely to play in the eleven were spoken of very much as possible cabinet ministers are after a general election.

Nothing else was talked of.

"We're safe to beat them," said Harvey to Jack.

"I don't know that," answered Jack. "Theirs is a larger school than ours, and they have bigger fellows and more weight. They have a larger choice than we. It will be a hard tussle."

"Are you chosen?"

"Yes. Collinson has promised to put me in, and I think you will be the goal-keeper."

"Try and work it for me, will you?" said Harvey, anxiously. "I should so like to play. Collinson is fond of you, and if you ask him it is sure to come off."

Jack promised to do his best for him, and exerted his influence on his behalf successfully.

The eleven being chosen, the boys practiced every day, and played very well together.

When the important day arrived, chairs were placed near a tent, in which refreshments were provided for the ladies. A reporter was present from the country paper, and a good number of spectators thronged the field.

The boys of both schools were present, ready to back up their respective eleven.

The Eton game was selected, and the game began in the center of the field by what is called a bully.

Collinson was post, Jack side-post, Emery, a strongly-built boy, second side-post, and the other fellows close by supported them.

Behind was the flying-man, and behind him again the goal-keeper.

At the side of the bully was the corner, whose duty it was to put in the ball and watch for it's coming out.

Hunston, senior, was post for Begbie's supported by Merriman and Silcox.

"Are you ready?" said the corner.

The reply being in the affirmative, the ball was put in between the two posts, and the bully swayed backward and forward.

Hunston, senior's, side being the heaviest, their strength enabled them to push the ball through; and Merriman, pushing it along at about a yard at a time, first with one foot and then with another, came up with the flying man, dexterously tripped him up and made play for goal.

Every eye was now fixed upon him and Harvey, who advanced to meet him.

"Well played, Begbie," shouted the doctor's boys; well played, indeed.

Crawcour's boys held their breath, tremulous with expectation.

Merriman was too wary a player to take a cool kick. He never let the ball get away from him.

All depended upon Harvey.

Suddenly they met about a dozen yards from the goal.

The shock was tremendous.

Presently Harvey lay on his back, with a tremendous "shin," which tingled up to his knee, but he had sent the ball flying back into the middle of the field over the players' heads.

"Bravo! Hurrah! Well played, Harvey. Good again, sir!" arose on all sides.

The goal was saved, and Harvey picked himself up, limping back to the goal, but not caring much for his hurt, in the consciousness that he had done his duty well.

Jack so managed to get the ball, and, closely followed by Hunston, senior, and others, played it swiftly to the other side.

Hunston overtook him and tried to twist the ball round, just as Jack kicked it hard, but he only succeeded in diverting its course from the goal-sticks, and it went spinning behind, missing the goal by about a foot.

"Touch it, touch it!" cried Jack's side.

Both boys started after the ball, straining every nerve to arrive at it first, as touching the ball was a very important operation, a touch being the next thing to a goal.

If Jack touched it first, he gained what is called a "rouge," which we shall describe directly.

If Hunston, on the other hand, touched it, the result was simply a kick off from goals without any sensible advantage to either side.

They were neck and neck, and the excitement was intense.

"Touched?" cried Jack, leaning forward and throwing himself upon the ball.

"A rouge! a rouge!" exclaimed Crawcour's boys.

"By Jove! we're beating them in a canter," remarked Mr. Mole, with a pardonable pride.

"How well Harkaway Bedington plays!" said Mr. Crawcour, "and how handsome he looks in his red shirt and white cap!"

Both elevens walked to the goal.

Hunston, senior, took a yard from the center of the goal, and stood still.

His eleven formed in a semi-circle, on each side of him. Their object was to keep the other side from getting the ball between the sticks.

Crawcour now completed the circle, leaving a gap for Jack to run in at, and the ball was placed between Hunston's feet.

As soon as Jack had touched the ball, the struggle commenced, and a fierce one it was.

He ran in at the gap with great impetuosity, and was all confusion.

Hunston, senior, held the ball tightly, in spite of kicks, and putting his elbows on Jack's shoulders, tried to force him down.

His great bulk enabled him to succeed in this endeavor, and Jack fell face downward over the ball.

A dozen fellows fell upon him, and in the scrimmage which ensued he received more kicks on all parts of the body than he could count on his fingers twice over.

Begbie succeeded in getting the ball from under him, and kicked it away.

Away went the eleven after it into the middle of the field.

One boy, however, lay upon his side, and did not move. It was Jack.

No one noticed him but the goal-keeper, a fellow named Simmons, and bending over him, he said:

"Are you hurt, young man?"

"Yes," replied Jack, feebly.

"Where? About your legs?"

"No; about my neck. I can't move it. Oh!"

This was followed by a prolonged groan.

"Hi, hi!" shouted Simmons. "Merriman! Hunston! Here's a man come to grief."

Hearing the cry, the boys halted in their career, and Merriman exclaimed:

"Hold the ball, some one. Stop the game."

"What are they stopping for?" inquired Mrs. Crawcour.

"Some one hurt, my dear," answered the principal, hastening to the spot.

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Dr. Begbie, following him.

"Who is it? Oh, dear, what a sad thing! I did not think this horrid football was so dangerous," continued Mrs. Crawcour, adding, "Do, Mr. Mole, go and see what has happened, and bring me the news."

"Yes, ma'am, I will," replied the senior master, hurrying off.

Jack was now surrounded by a dense ring of spectators, all anxious to know what was the matter with him.

"Mr. Crawcour was the first to kneel by his side."

"No bones broken, I hope?"

"I fear there are, sir," replied Jack. "I'm in great pain. It's my neck. I felt something crack when the fellows tumbled over me."

Passing his hand gently over the boy's neck, the principal turned to Dr. Begbie and said:

"I don't know anything of surgery, but I should say the collar-bone was broken, and in more than one place."

"Dear me, how sad!" replied the doctor, pityingly.

"We must get him home."

"I'll go and get a hurdle from the sheep-pen at the bottom of the field," said Collinson, starting for that purpose.

Jack grew deadly pale, his eyes closed, his head fell heavily back, and he scarcely seemed to breathe.

"Stand back! Stand back, all of you!" exclaimed Mr. Crawcour. "The lad's fainted. Give him air."

Merryman took up a goal stick, and by dint of hitting the boys on the shins drove them back, and the current of air was not impeded.

In a few minutes Collinson returned with the hurdle, on which Jack was placed.

Merryman, Collinson, Harvey and Simmons each took a corner.

Hunston, senior, refused to help, saying, as he turned away:

"I'm not going to carry him."

"Brute!" said Harvey, loud enough for him to hear.

"Am I?" replied Hunston, savagely. "Wait till I meet you alone, old cock, and I'll give you brute."

The melancholy procession now started for home, and the boys stood about in groups, discussing the accident.

Play was over for that day, as the match was effectually interrupted by the disastrous occurrence to one of Crawcour's best players.

Mr. Mole was sent on in advance to bring a doctor from Lillie Bridge.

Mrs. Crawcour hastened back to get a bed ready for the sufferer's reception in a quiet and private part of the house, where he would be far from noise and interruption.

CHAPTER IX.

A KIND NURSE.

THE doctor made an examination of Jack, and soon discovered the extent of his injuries.

His collar-bone was broken in two places, as Mr. Crawcour had imagined.

"He must remain in bed," said he, "for a few weeks. I will set the bone. An accident of this sort at his age is never serious. He is young, has a good constitution, and will soon be on his legs again."

The bone was set, and the anxiety of his friends respecting him allayed.

His mother and father drove over to see him, and he was well supplied with various little dainties and books to while away the tedious confinement in the sick-room.

Mrs. Crawcour was kindness itself to him, and it seemed as if she could not lavish too much tenderness upon him.

Jack liked to see her come into his room, and sit down by the bedside, smooth his hair, hold his hand in hers, and talk to him with her sweet, musical voice.

Hers were like an angel's visits, and she did more good by her attendance than the doctor with all his medicines and splints.

When he was well enough to be moved she had him brought into the drawing-room, and he dined at her own table, Mr. Crawcour making no objections, as his wife's will was always law to him.

The cold, cheerless winter had gone, and the pleasant

Springtime made the fields and hedgerows green and resonant with the songs of birds and the perfume of innumerable wild flowers.

Jack's delight was to get out in the garden and sit in a rustic chair, reading some book in the glorious sunshine.

After a while he got quite well and strong again, and felt that he ought to join his schoolfellows once more, but Mrs. Crawcour insisted upon it that he was not quite cured.

"You would get romping with some rough boys, and break the bone again," she exclaimed one day, sitting down by his side in the drawing-room on the sofa.

"I hope not, ma'am," replied Jack.

"You shall not run the risk, however," she continued. "I promised your mamma that I would care for you. Have I been kind? Are you satisfied with me?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. I should like to be ill forever, if I might always have so kind a nurse as yourself."

She put her arm round his neck, and kissed his forehead, while she smoothed back his curly chestnut hair from his temples.

"How would you like to have me for a mamma?" she asked.

"I would rather have you for—for—"

He hesitated.

"Well, dear, for what? Speak out," said Mrs. Crawcour, in an encouraging tone.

"I was going to say for a sweetheart, ma'am."

"But you have one. The little girl who sent you the money is your sweetheart, is she not?"

"I like her very much, but not nearly so much as I do you, ma'am. You are so lovely," replied Jack.

"Am I lovely?" Mrs. Crawcour repeated, looking at her handsome and majestic figure in the glass with some satisfaction.

The hot blood mounted to Jack's face and made it burn.

"How you blush! Why do you blush so?" She said.

"I don't know, ma'am? It's because I'm taking to you, I think."

"But you can't have me for a sweetheart. I am your schoolmistress and your master's wife."

"Still I may love you quietly and at a distance, ma'am. You cannot help people loving you."

"You are a funny boy," she exclaimed, kissing him again.

"I was cruel to you once," she continued. "I should have thought you had not forgotten it."

"Long ago, ma'am. I do not care for anything you might do to me," replied Jack.

"Silly boy," she said. "Now go into the garden and play; I will call you when dinner is ready."

Jack took a fond, lingering look at her, and reluctantly left the drawing-room, the window of which opened on the ground and admitted him to the lawn.

He strolled along, intent upon his own thoughts, until he came to a high wall which separated the garden from the yard, in which he could hear the boys playing.

Their voices made him long to be among them again, and for the time the pretty Mrs. Crawcour was forgotten.

All at once a piece of wood struck him on the arm.

He looked round to see where it came from and found Harvey in the branches of a tall chestnut tree, which grew in the playground, from which he had often obtained a view of the principal's private pleasure garden.

"Hallo, Dick," he cried, "mind Mole don't nail you."

"He's gone," replied Harvey.

"Gone where?"

"To see his pigeons in the loft, and there is no master in the playground; so I thought I'd swarm up this tree and take a squint round to see if I could get a glimpse of you; and now, how are you, old man?"

"First rate, thank you."

"You don't know how we miss you. When are you coming back?" continued Harvey.

"Shan't be long first, I expect. Get on the wall and come over."

"Won't there be a row?"

"No," answered Jack; "I can do as I like with Mrs. Crawcour. She won't say anything to me."

"You're a wonderful fellow. You generally do contrive to do pretty much as you like."

"Why shouldn't I?" replied Jack, with a laugh.

Harvey climbed like a cat along the wall, and descended by the aid of a fruit tree, it being lucky the gardener did not see him, as he knocked the buds off in a ruinous manner.

The friends shook hands.

"Glad to see you about again," said Harvey.

"Thank you," replied Jack. "Don't Mole keep his pigeons over the stables?"

"Yes, in the loft."

"Let's have a lark with him. I've been shut off so long that a spree would do me good."

"There is a door at the bottom of the garden," added Jack. "I have noticed the key is always in the lock on this side. We can get through."

"And then?"

"Wait, and you'll see. I've got an idea. Come on," replied Jack.

Harvey followed him in high glee.

They passed through the door and were in the stable yard.

The pigeons were flying about and whirling over the roof in eccentric circles, as if they did not like an intruder in their cot.

Mr. Mole was a great pigeon fancier.

He took a great deal of care with his birds; with them he won prizes at shows, and sold fancy sorts for high prices, so that he made money out of them.

He had fantails, and pouters, and carriers, and tumblers, and all the select varieties.

A common blue-rock he disdained.

His were all prize birds.

A ladder stood in the yard, its top reaching to the entrance of the loft.

"Give us a hand Harvey, and we'll move the ladder," exclaimed Jack.

They did so, and placed it against the wall, waiting anxiously for the senior master's appearance.

Presently Mr. Mole popped his head out to the loft.

"Bless me, where is the ladder!" he exclaimed.

But seeing Jack he added:

"Oh, you're about again, Harkaway, glad to see you.

By the way, have you touched the ladder?"

"I think the gardener took it, sir. Shall I go and see?" asked Jack.

"Thank you. It is very awkward to be up here. I have no means of getting down."

Jack and Harvey hid themselves in the stable, pretending they were looking for the ladder, and amused themselves by watching the senior master's perplexity for more than half an hour.

The coachman happened to come by, and Mr. Mole addressed him respecting the ladder.

"Here it is on the right, sir," answered the coachman, fixing it for him against the loft.

"Those boys must be blind," remarked Mr. Mole. "But perhaps they are looking for it in the garden, and the gardener has brought it back during their absence. I will descend—*facilis decensus*, as we say in school."

"Quick, Dick," cried Jack, emerging from the stable. "Shove this at the foot of the ladder."

He pointed out a liquid manure tank which moved on wheels, and which the gardener had that morning filled with a dark-looking liquid from a cesspool.

Harvey and Jack wheeled it to the foot of the ladder as Mr. Mole had got half-way down.

His face was toward the rungs of the ladder and his back to the boys, so that he could not see what they were about.

Jack followed by Harvey, retreated to the friendly shelter of the stable again.

All at once Mr. Mole caught his foot against the side of the tank, and, thinking he had reached the ground, jumped lightly off, and fell into the midst of the liquid manure.

The shock made him lose his balance, and he tumbled head-first into the tank and was completely covered.

He rose again, dripping and reeking with the filthy stuff, and spat and spluttered dreadfully.

The coachman, hearing his cries, came out of the coach-house and assisted him on dry land.

"Is this your doing, my man?" exclaimed Mr. Mole.

"No, sir," answered the coachman; "not me."

"It must be those boys, then. Where are they?"

"I saw them go into the stable, sir."

Mr. Mole strode toward the stable and pounced upon Jack. Harvey had hidden behind some straw.

"You little vagabond!" cried Mr. Mole, shaking his fist at him.

"What for?" asked Jack, innocently.

"What for! Didn't you put the liquid manure tank under the ladder for me to fall into?"

"I left it for a moment, sir, but didn't think you would come down without looking. Please don't come so near, sir; I can hear you just as well if you stand near the door. The fact is, you don't smell nice."

"This impudence is monstrous!" said Mr. Mole, raising his hand as if to strike him.

"Don't hit me, sir. The doctor says I mustn't have my ears boxed because of my collar-bone," said Jack.

"You're a humbug!" cried Mr. Mole, frantic with rage. "You continue to stay out of school and shirk your work, though you are well enough to play off your confounded tricks upon me."

Jack held his handkerchief to his nose.

"I'll tell the principal of you, depend upon that."

"Let me pass, please. My dinner is ready, and I must not keep Mrs. Crawcour waiting. Let me suggest a little soap and water, sir," said Jack. "You do smell."

Mr. Mole was unable to speak, his rage was so great.

Jack stepped by and made his escape, going into the private garden and locking the door after him.

A pretty plight the senior master was in.

It was almost as bad as being tarred and feathered.

He had a bath and scented himself with eau de Cologne.

But even then his hair and whiskers were redolent of the muck into which he had fallen, and he had to throw his clothes into the dust-bin.

In the garden Jack saw Mr. Pumbleton taking a constitutional.

Stopping under a beech tree which was covered with young leaves, he began to throw stones up.

"What's the matter, Harkaway?" asked Mr. Pumbleton, kindly. "Are you getting better?"

"Yes, thank you, sir; I'm in my old form again almost."

"We shall have you back in school soon, I suppose?"

"Hope so, sir."

"What are you throwing at?"

"Mrs. Crawcour's pet parrot has got loose, sir. Will you have a shy?" answered Jack.

"Certainly. Where is it?" inquired Mr. Pumbleton.

"Up there, sir, somewhere. I saw it just now. Throw hard, sir, my arm aches."

"Dear me! I would do anything to oblige Mrs. Crawcour. She's a fine woman, Harkaway—every inch a lady."

"So she is, sir; shy away."

Mr. Pumbleton hurled up a stone.

It went through the leaves, and, as Jack anticipated, went over the walls of the kitchen garden and broke a pane of glass in the greenhouse.

Another and another stone shared the same fate.

"What was that?" asked Mr. Pumbleton; "I thought I heard a smash."

"Nothing, sir; it's all right. Shy away," answered Jack.

Mr. Crawcour was in his greenhouse, seeing to his geraniums, and when he saw the stones flying through the glass he thought it high time to go and see who was the destroyer of his property.

Jack sat down and awaited for the fun he knew would ensue.

Presently Mr. Crawcour made his appearance.

"Mr. Pumbleton," exclaimed the principal, angrily,

"what on earth are you doing? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"On the contrary, sir, your wife's pet parrot has got loose, and is up this tree. I am trying to dislodge it."

"But you have broken—"

"There it goes, sir, over the wall," cried Jack, pointing in the direction of the kitchen garden.

"Ah! I thought I should do it," answered Mr. Pumbleton, with a complacent smile.

"After it, sir, quick," continued Jack; "I'll give you a leg up, sir."

"Which way, my boy?"

"Here, sir, follow me," Jack said, running to the wall.

"What is there on the other side?" asked the second master, cautiously.

He did not know the exact position of the conservatory.

"Nothing to hurt, sir, only a heap of leaves. Nice to fall on, sir. Look sharp or the bird will be off again. Mrs. Crawcour wouldn't lose her parrot for ever so much."

This was enough for Mr. Pumbleton, who secretly admired Mrs. Crawcour, and was especially desirous of getting into her good graces.

Over he went, without looking before him, and the consequence was that he fell through the glass of the conservatory with a crash that made the principal's heart ache.

He had fallen on one of the wooden supports, a leg on each side, and remained perched there, the image of despair.

Being hurt in his fall, he groaned dismally.

Jack was over the wall in a safe place like a shot.

Going into the greenhouse he stood on a pair of steps, and, with a thick piece of rope, tied Mr. Pumbleton's legs together firmly.

"Harkaway, what are you doing?" cried the second master. "Misguided boy, unfasten my legs. I am, in American parlance, riding upon a rail, which is extremely painful to a biped or two-legged creature."

Jack looked up at him through the broken panes of glass and made a face.

Then he plucked a bunch of grapes, one of the last of the season, and began to leisurely eat them.

Mr. Crawcour had by this time arrived on the scene, and stood angrily surveying Mr. Pumbleton from the garden.

"Come down, sir," he shouted.

"Can't—nonsense."

"Should be very glad, sir, if my legs were not tied."

"You've been hoaxed," continued Mr. Crawcour. "The parrot is in his cage. I saw it through the drawing-room window. What do you mean by smashing my greenhouse roof like that?"

"Oh, my legs," replied Mr. Pumbleton. "I beseech you, sir, if you have any of the milk of human kindness in your composition, to instantly release me from my painful position."

"Are you really tied?" asked the Principal.

"Hard and fast, on my honor as a gentleman."

"Who did it?"

"Harkaway—oh, oh! I shall be cut in half. You would not like to see me in two pieces, Mr. Crawcour."

"Hang that boy," exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, going to the door of the conservatory.

Here he met Jack eating grapes.

"Have a grape, sir?" he said.

Mr. Crawcour gave him a cuff on the ear.

He could not help it.

There is a limit to human endurance.

"Mind my collar-bone, please, sir," said Jack.

"Bother your collar-bone. Get out, or I shall do you an injury," replied Mr. Crawcour.

Jack thought it advisable to take the hint, and he went.

When he got over the wall, leaving the principal of Pomona House to extricate, as best he could, the unfortunate master of the second division from his uncomfortable position, he ran to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Crawcour.

"I was just going to call you to dinner, John," she exclaimed, smiling upon him.

"Will you protect me, ma'am?" he asked.

"Of course I will. From what?"

"I've offended Mr. Crawcour, ma'am; but it was only fun," Jack replied, penitently.

"What have you done?"

"And Mr. Mole and Mr. Pumbleton, too, are full against me. I'll tell you presently, ma'am. But here comes Mr. Crawcour and Mr. Pumbleton. Take my part, ma'am, will you?"

"I have told you I will. Whatever you have done, they shall not punish you. It might throw you back."

"So it might, ma'am. I don't feel at all strong to-day," replied Jack, hypocritically.

"Poor boy, said Mrs. Crawcour, with a glance of sympathy.

The principal, frowning, entered the room at this juncture, with the second master, who made frequent grimaces, as if in considerable pain.

CHAPTER X.

JACK SETS THE SCHOOL ON FIRE.

Mrs. Crawcour looked at her husband and the master in an angry manner.

"Why do you gentlemen intrude upon me, in my drawing-room, in this boisterous manner?" she exclaimed.

"Because, my dear, this young monkey has been at his tricks again," replied Mr. Crawcour.

"What ricks?"

"Ask Mr. Pumbleton, who is now suffering from the effects of his playfulness, as you would, perhaps, call it—my respected coadjutor, Pumbleton, very nearly broke his neck by tumbling into the greenhouse."

"With all respect to Mr. Pumbleton, I must say he should have seen where he was going to."

"If the boy is well enough to indulge in practical jokes, he is well enough to go into school."

"You will punish him no further," said Mrs. Crawcour, "he claimed my protection and I wish him to be pardoned."

"Since it is your desire, I consent," rejoined Mr. Crawcour, "though I must say, my dear, that your request is singularly ill-timed, and it goes very much against the grain with me to grant it. Harkaway, go to school at once, and beware lest you provoke me too far."

Jack thanked his mistress with a look, and, thinking himself very lucky, went away at once, lest the principal might change his mind and introduce to his acquaintance those little persuaders, as he called them, which he kept in a cabinet ready for instant use.

The boys welcomed him back again gladly; and he was not sorry to be among them once more; the confinement he had undergone had proved very tedious.

It was the play hour.

In half-an-hour dinner would be ready, and Jack regretted that his expulsion had not been deferred till after dinner, as he generally got some dainty in the dining-room from Mrs. Crawcour.

A savory smell came from the region of the kitchen, and Jack putting his head in at the window, said:

"Cook, what's that?"

"What's what, sir?" replied the cook, who knew Jack well, as he had often been in the kitchen while recovering from his accident.

"That stuff that smells so nice?"

"Boiled rabbit and onion sauce for the up-stairs dinner, Master Harkaway," replied the cook.

"Oh, all right; I'll come round."

"What for? You've got mutton, and a nice batter pudding."

"That's for the boys," said Jack; "I know—mutton and stodge; but Mrs. Crawcour said I was to come to you and have rabbit, because I'm delicate, you know, cookey. Oh, my, shouldn't I like to give you a kiss!"

"Go along with your impudence, Master Jack," said the cook, laughing.

"I'll come to you with it, and, I say, just cut me one of those bunnies in half. I like the hind part; there's more to eat on it; and give me lots of onion sauce and don't forget the boiled pork, cookey."

"Lor' bless me, what a boy it is!" said the cook, who never doubted that Mrs. Crawcour had given him leave to take part of the principal's dinner.

Jack made his way round to the kitchen and passed Harvey.

"Where are you off to?" said Harvey. "The fellows told me you had come back."

"Look through the kitchen window, Dick," replied Jack; "and you'll be able to see the whole performance free of charge, gratis, for nothing."

Harvey started after him, but did as he had been told, and the next minute saw Jack comfortably seated at the kitchen table, where a cloth had been laid for him, pegging away at the principal's dinner.

"Isn't it nice to be ill?" said Jack, cutting off a fine, tender-looking leg.

"How do you do it?" asked Harvey.

"It's wonderful how we do it, but we do. Don't we, cookey darling?" answered Jack, with his mouth half-full; adding, "I say, Dick, this rabbit's stunning, and the pork's first-rate, and cookey can make onion sauce and no mistake. Do it again, my dear."

"Do what, Master Jack?" asked the cook.

"Give me another help of pork and a nice crummy potato; and I think as you're so pressing, I'll finish the bunny. There's nice picking about a rabbit's head, and don't forget the pork. Cut it fat."

"You're cutting it fat, I think," said the cook. "There won't be enough for master's dinner if you'd eat a whole rabbit."

"They must go short for once. It won't hurt them," replied Jack, coolly.

"Pile it on, cookey; don't be afraid of it. The principal is fat enough. Let him put in a streak of lean for once in the way."

The cook laughed, and Jack finished his dinner, much to his satisfaction, and rejoined Harvey outside.

"You're going it, my tulip," said Harvey.

"I believe you, my pigeon," replied Jack. "I'm bound to go it. And now what do you say to a glass of rhubarb wine to wind up with?"

"Where is it?"

"I know where it lives. You don't suppose I have had the run of the house for a fortnight or more and not know where the cask of rhubarb wine lives? Oh, Dick!" exclaimed Jack, with a ruefully injured expression of countenance which was quite comical.

"I haven't grubbed yet. I'm not like you."

"Full to the bung," said Jack. "But come along. It will give you an appetite for dinner. I've got a gimlet, and a quill to suck it through. I had a taste the other day and it's A.1."

He led Harvey along a passage where the domestic offices were situated, no one taking any notice of them, and stopped before the door of a cellar, which he opened.

Before them were several small casks on pedestals of brick, for Mr. Crawcour was fond of making British wine for home consumption.

"There's cowslip and gooseberry," exclaimed Jack. "I don't know what's in the fourth and fifth; but if you take my tip you'll stand the rhubarb."

Harvey expressed his willingness to do so, and Jack made a hole with his gimlet in the cask, into which he stuck the quill.

Each of the boys applied their lips in turn, and drank and talked in whispers, and drank again, until the wine, which had a considerable portion of brandy in its composition, began to take effect upon their unseasoned heads, which were not accustomed to such strong potations.

The dinner bell rang.

"Dick, dinner's ready. Out along to your dally mutton, your swipes, and your stickjaw pudding. I don't envy you; but you'd better go!" exclaimed Jack.

"Bother the dinner! I'm going to have some more

wine," replied Harvey, who scarcely knew what he was saying.

Jack endeavored to stand up and look severely at Harvey, who was sucking away vigorously at the quill, but he was unable to do so.

The wine had taken effect upon him also, and, with a ludicrously funny lurch, he rolled against the wall and sat down.

"Dick," he said, laughing, "you're screwed."

"If any one but you had said that, Jack, I'd have punched his head," replied Harvey.

"I say you're as tight as a besom. A nice life of it. I shall have to get you into bed."

"You're as bad," Harvey said, letting his head fall on one side. Presently he rolled over, and lay on his back just under the quill, so that the wine ran slowly down his neck, and insinuated itself under his clothes until he was saturated.

Jack tried to laugh, but he, too, felt sleepy, and fell across his friend's body.

There they lay like the two babes in the wood, until a hue and cry was raised after them.

One of the servants said she recollected seeing two boys go along the passage.

A search was made and the culprits were found fast asleep, soaked in the wine which had all run out of the barrel.

The news was at once taken to the principal of Pomona House, who with Mr. Mole proceeded to the cellar.

"Disgraceful!" he exclaimed. "Let them be put to bed. I will make an example of them."

The boys were accordingly carried up-stairs, undressed, and put to bed.

Whatever the principal's intentions were on first discovering the delinquents, they were considerably modified the next day.

Probably Mrs. Crawcour interested herself on Jack's behalf when she heard from the servant what had happened.

Some tea and toast were brought them when they woke up, and for this they were undoubtedly indebted to her kindness.

Mr. Crawcour merely told them that they would have nothing but water for dinner for a fortnight, and dismissed them with an admonition.

Toward the end of March a German named Herr Schmellfungus came to Lillie Bridge to give a lecture on chemistry.

Mr. Crawcour, wishing to encourage the scientific taste of his boys, gave them all permission to go to the lecture hall and hear it.

Accordingly they were marshaled under the care of Mr. Mole, and went to the town, being much pleased with the experiments.

Jack, like most lads of his age after having witnessed a novelty, was full of it.

He thought of chemistry, and talked about nothing else.

Procuring some materials, he announced to a circle of privileged and delighted friends that he would give them a private lecture, illustrated with startling experiments.

Jack's study was the last one in the row and close to the school-room. He had fitted it up neatly with chairs, table, carpet and bookcases.

The upper boys were allowed to prepare their lessons in their studies, and frequently sat in one another's room in the evening, so that Jack easily got up an audience to hear his lecture.

Collinson, Harvey and half-a-dozen more were ranged in chairs near the door.

Jack stood behind a table near the window.

On the table were ranged sundry phials and saucers, containing variously colored liquids and powders.

"Gentlemen," began Jack, "I will presume that you are aware that chemistry is the science which teaches the nature and constitution of bodies, and the manner of their action on each other."

"Observe the solution. It is colorless, yet iron is present in it. See, I add a little mixture of galls and it turns black."

"Bravo Jack!" from Harvey.

"You shut up, and don't interrupt the lecture," exclaimed Jack, with dignity.

"Chemical affinity," he resumed, "is more strongly shown between some substances than others. Take sulphuric acid. You observe that it combines with barytes in preference to potash, but again it prefers potash to soda."

"I don't, when there's a little brandy in it," remarked Collinson.

"Order, gentlemen!" said Jack. "Now, by latent heat I am about to produce gases or vapors. Observe this quicklime. I pour water on it, and it becomes hot enough to light this bit of phosphorus."

"Capital!" cried Harvey. "You can do it, Jack."

By some chance or other the phosphorous burnt to Jack's finger, and with a howl he let it fall into some ycopodium, which caught fire; this ignited some salt-peter, charcoal and sulphur, which blew up, blackening his face, and upset a jar of gas.

The gas exploded with a loud bang, knocking Jack backward and shattering some panes of glass.

The spectators rushed to the door and got into the yard without being hurt, and Jack, throwing up the window, made his escape that way, feeling rather dizzy and confused, as well as half-choked with a compound of villainous smells.

Meantime the table-cloth caught fire, which extended to the curtains, the mantel-piece, and the woodwork of the window; so that in an incredibly short space the study was on fire.

The wind was blowing strongly at the time, and dense clouds of smoke arose, mingled with tongues of fire.

At the sound of the explosion Mr. Mole rushed out of the schoolroom and met Harvey, breathless with excitement and frightened out of his wits.

"What's the matter?" asked the senior master.

"Oh, oh, sir!" replied Harvey.

"Oh, oh!" replied Mr. Mole, seizing his ear. "What has happened?"

"Harkaway's blown us up, sir."

"Blown you up? I shall blow you up," said the senior master, angrily.

"Look, sir, look!" replied Harvey, pointing to the smoke and flames issuing from the study.

Then Mr. Mole began to comprehend dimly what had really occurred.

Rushing to the bell-rope, he pulled it violently, shouting:

"Fire! fire! fire!" as if he were mad.

CHAPTER XI.

SEND HIM TO SEA.

THE school-yard was soon full of people—men, women, and boys—the women screaming, and the boys shouting, as if they rather liked it, and hoped the whole place would be burnt down, so that they might have a holiday till it was built up again.

Mr. Crawcour and his assistant masters lost their heads, and did not know what to do.

"Run for the engines," said Mr. Crawcour.

Nobody stirred.

"Pump on it," suggested Mr. Mole.

The pump being some distance off, and only sending a volume of water a few inches, this idea was not thought worthy of consideration.

"Slip into Harkaway; I would. He did it!" exclaimed Maple.

The principal of Pomona House heard this and would have acted on this advice, only there was one difficulty in the way, and that was Jack could not be found.

The fact was he had come to the conclusion that nothing could save the whole of the school buildings from being burnt to the ground, and he had climbed up into a tree to enjoy the sight without interruption.

Safely perched upon a forked branch, he awaited the gradual spread of the flames with philosophical calmness.

Jack had always been fond of fires.

When quite a youngster, he had run all the way from Highgate to Pentonville to see a fire, and was found the next day at the Clerkenwell police-station, quietly eating bread and butter, which had been generously supplied him by the policeman who had found him sitting disconsolately on a doorstep, and crying because he did not know his way home.

Suddenly Mrs. Crawcour made her appearance in the crowd, and walked to where the masters were standing in a group, looking, as they were, panic-stricken.

"Why do you not do something?" she exclaimed. "Get buckets and form a chain, so that you can throw the water on the burning building. Do you not see that if the conflagration is not checked, it will soon extend to the school, and the whole building will be enveloped in flames?"

"Excellent, my dear. Mole, Pumpleton, Stoner, my dear, good fellows, run to the stable for buckets," said Mr. Crawcour, with tears in his eyes. "I will place the boys in two chains to pass the buckets backward and forward, and do the pumping myself. For Heaven's sake bestir yourself! Save me! Save my school!"

Having got the idea, there was little difficulty in carrying it out.

Buckets were procured, a double chain formed, and the principal pumped away with a will, while Mr. Mole was made chief fireman, and standing on a pair of steps soon began to make an impression on the fire.

Jack got down from the tree in disgust.

He walked into the crowd and found out Harvey, who was as black as a sweep through helping Mr. Mole, and had fallen out of the service for a time, owing to fatigue.

"I say, Dick," exclaimed Jack, "here's a beastly sell. I thought we should have a good flare-up."

"I'm glad the fire is going out," replied Harvey.

"Are you? I'm not."

"Look at the damage," said Harvey.

"What does that matter? Cracour's insured, and any damage above the insurance my guy would have made up. I took the trouble to be nearly blown out of the window and have my curly locks singed, and then they go and put it out. I never was so sold."

In less than an hour the fire was got under, and nothing of it remained but the smoking ruins of Jack's study and the one adjoining.

A strict investigation was made into the cause of the fire.

"But it was purely an accident, Mr. Crawcour," reprimanded Jack, and put a stop to any further fire-works.

Still he was very much annoyed, and drove over to Willow Copse Hall the next day to see Mr. Bedington, whom he intended to ask for a check for the damage, as the insurance did not cover the studies, which had been built since he effected it.

Mr. Bedington and his wife were in the drawing-room, and received the visitor with some anxiety, as if they feared that their boy had again been doing something outrageous.

Mr. Crawcour soon told them what had happened, and they felt equally as much annoyed as he did.

"Certainly, you shall be paid for any loss my son has put you to," said Mr. Bedington. "I will send a competent surveyor to act with one appointed by yourself to estimate the extent of the damage."

"I fear," remarked Mrs. Bedington, "that John is irrepressible. He is always doing something."

"Always, ma'am," replied Mr. Crawcour, "and yet I can't help liking the lad."

The mother thanked him with a glance for this speech.

"I'll tell you what it is, Crawcour," said Mr. Bedington. "I shall have to send him to sea."

"As a profession?" asked Mrs. Bedington.

"No, my dear, but just to knock some of the nonsense out of him. I know what the sea is. The life is hard, and a boy gets more kicks than half-pence."

"Jack will grow out of his bad habits," said Mrs. Bedington.

"It don't look like it."

"The sea," observed Mr. Crawcour, "is all very well in its way. I should be sorry to part with Jack; but when it comes to setting the school on fire, why, you know, one must draw a line somewhere, and much as I like the lad, and esteem you, sir, I think I should be better off if he did go to sea."

"Thank you for being candid," replied Mr. Bedington, with a laugh.

"No offense, I hope."

"None at all, though if you say you want to get rid of the boy, I begin to think he must be what we call in the city a bad lot."

After a little further conversation, which resulted in nothing being settled, Mr. Crawcour took his departure, saying he hoped he should be able to give a better account of his unruly pupil at the end of the half.

Getting into his trap, he drove off.

He had not started from Pomona House until past four, and it was quite dark when he left for home.

About a mile from the school he had to descend a steep hill, and being a cautious driver he went very slowly.

Having nearly reached the bottom, his horse stumbled, the trap turned over on its side, and the principal was gracefully pitched out on the top of a quick-set hedge.

His temper was not improved by the numerous pricks and scratches he received in getting down from his uncomfortable position.

"Bother the horse!" he exclaimed, as he rubbed first an arm and then a leg. "Dunce take the clumsy beast! How those thorns do prick to be sure!"

All at once, in the imperfect light, he saw standing before him two masked figures.

Could they be highwaymen?

He thought the knights of the road had gone out with the introduction of railways and electric telegraph.

"Money or your life!" cried a sepulchral voice, and at the same moment what appeared to be a pistol was presented at his head.

Money was dear to him, but life was dearer.

Sinking on his knees in the muddy road, Mr. Crawcour, before whose awful nod his boys were wont to tremble, said in quivering tones: "Spare me, good gentlemen, spare me. I am only a poor schoolmaster, whose profits in the education of youth are small—I may say they are entirely swallowed up in pampering with my pupils, and—"

"Speak the truth!" said another voice, equally sepulchral with the first.

"Silver or gold I have but little," continued Mr. Crawcour; "but that little I will freely give you, good, kind gentlemen, if you will let me depart in peace and continue my way."

"The money?" demanded the foremost highwayman.

"Take it, kind sir," answered Mr. Crawcour, emptying his pockets.

"That watch and chain!"

"Was a gift from my grandmother," pleaded the principal.

"Bother your grandmother; hand it out, or—"

The pistol gleamed again with its polished barrel in the uncertain light, and Mr. Crawcour delivered up his watch.

"That ring," continued the masked robber.

"Is my signet."

"Fork it out!"

The ring was handed to the highwayman and placed with the watch and the money.

"Now one word more," said the highwayman. "You say you are a schoolmaster. Have you a boy named Harkaway under your care?"

"I have, sir."

"Beware how you answer. Have you not been to his parents to complain of him, meanly telling tales behind his back? No falsehood. He is my first cousin."

"Indeed, Mr. Highwayman, sir," answered the principal, astonished. "I was not aware of that important fact."

"Treat him with the utmost kindness," continued the robber, "and in three weeks' time your watch, ring and money shall be returned to you; but utter a cross word, frown upon him even, and dread the vengeance of Turpin the second. Dick, are you ready?"

"Yes," replied the other masked villain.

"To horse, then, and let this miserable worm crawl home as best he may."

Suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs were heard, and the lights of a carriage appeared rapidly approaching.

The principal of Pomona House gained courage.

In the darkness his terror had magnified his assailants into giants, but when he came to look at them again he thought they were very undersized scoundrels.

"Help—help!" he cried.

"Knock him on the head," said Dick.

"Hold your row. 'Silence!' said Turpin the second. But the trap stopped and two men got out.

"What is it?" asked one.

"Thieves!—murder!—help! Help!—thieves!" roared the principal.

He was engaged in a deadly struggle with the foremost robber, whom he had desperately clutched.

His accomplice had made off through a gap in the hedge.

Mr. Crawcour's strength was double that of his antagonist, and he presently dragged him down and laid him on his back in the road.

"Lights here!" he exclaimed.

The travelers detached one of the lamps from the gig and carried it to the scene of action.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A SEA CAPTAIN.

THE mask had fallen from the ruffian's face, and the principal of Pomona House expected to see truculent features disclosed to his view.

But no.

He started back in astonishment.

"Whom have we here?" he cried in blank amazement. Jack's face, smiling in spite of adversity, looked beamingly up at him.

"It's only I, sir," he exclaimed.

"Harkaway Bedington," said the schoolmaster. "Harkaway, under the guise of a highwayman, has dared to stop and rob his respected preceptor. Wonders will never cease."

"Do you know the thief?" asked one of the strangers in the gig.

They were commercial travelers on their way to Hertford.

"Don't you call me a thief, or I'll—" began Jack, rising to his feet and shaking some of the dirt off his clothes.

"What will you do, my young whipper-snapper?" interrupted the commercial traveler.

"Why, I'd eat you if you wasn't so big and unwholesome-looking," answered Jack; "as it is, consider yourself kicked."

"You're a nice fellow, I don't think, and it's my opinion you'll come to a bad end," said the commercial gentleman.

Jack let his head fall on one side, and put out his tongue derisively, trying to look as if he was being hanged.

"This, sir," said Mr. Crawcour, waving his hand impressively, "is my pupil."

"He doesn't do you much credit, then."

"Right, sir; your answer does credit to your sagacity and perspicacity. If those words are beyond your capacity, their meaning will be found in Johnson's Dictionary. The boy has been playing a trick upon me, but I require not your interference any further. You can go your ways."

"You might be civil, anyhow. Come, Jim, jump in and drive on. Any one would think it was the first of April, and all the fools had got let out for a holiday."

So saying, the commercial got into his gig, followed by his companion, and drove on.

"Come along," exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, grasping Jack tightly by the collar of his jacket.

"Hold hard a minute, sir," replied Jack.

"Why should I forbear?"

"Because you'll see those cheeky fellows go such a cropper directly."

As he spoke, the commercial's horse pitched over some concealed obstacle in the road, and the inside passengers, as Jack called them, alighted on the hedge-top, very much as Mr. Crawcour had done a very little while before.

"What is the cause of that?" asked the principal.

"I'll tell you presently, sir. Get into your trap and off. They'll be on to us for damages, if they know who we are. Make haste, sir."

Jack drew Mr. Crawcour along, and taking his knife out of his pocket, cut a rope he had stretched across the road.

This it was that caused both horses to stumble.

Mr. Crawcour was cunning enough to see what Jack meant, and seizing the reins of his own trap, they put it in the middle of the road, jumped in and drove off, while the naughty exclamations of the commercial were mingled with the derisive jeers of Jack.

"Jack," said Mr. Crawcour, when he deemed it prudent to slacken speed, "truly you show an ungovernable and unruly spirit."

"I'd have told those fellows to look out if they had not been so cocky, sir," answered Jack.

"It is not of them I speak."

"What then, sir?"

"This last outrage upon my person," replied Mr. Crawcour, in a saddened tone. "How I could have been so imposed upon I cannot tell. I fear me that you cannot remain at Pomona House. I have scolded you, I have caned you, I have kept you at Coventry, I have birched you, I have reasoned with you, but without any tangible result, and you must leave my classical and commercial academy, unless you alter."

"I'll try to reform, sir," replied Jack, penitently.

"Who was your companion in this evil scheme of highway robbery?"

"I would rather not say, sir."

"Let it not be bruited about in the school to my disadvantage, and I will pass over your fault."

"Not a word shall be said, sir."

"You promise me that?"

"Yes."

"And your companion?"

"He won't speak unless I tell him to," Jack said.

"By the way, restore to me my valuables," Mr. Crawcour exclaimed, thinking suddenly of his stolen property.

"Certainly, sir. There's your grandmother's watch, and the signet ring and the coin."

"The what?"

"The money, sir," answered Jack.

"I wish you boys would cultivate elegant English," said Mr. Crawcour, in a tone of remonstrance. "Your epithets are objectionable, your nouns corrupt, and your adjectives in the worst possible taste. But verily the rising generation is perverse. I caned it, and it alters not. I birch it, and lo! there is no change for the better."

Presently they reached Pomona House, and Jack went around the back way to the school-room.

Harvey, who had been his companion in the joke played upon the principal, had already arrived.

The two boys, upon hearing that Mr. Crawcour had driven over to Willow Copse Hall, determined to waylay him.

"He shan't go and sneak about me for nothing," Jack said.

Selecting the bottom of the hill as the best place to overthrow the old horse he drove, they tied a rope across the road when they heard him coming.

Harvey ran up the hill to make sure that it was Mr. Crawcour's gig they heard in the distance, and on his giving the signal to Jack, the latter passed the rope around a tree and made it tight.

What the ludicrous result was, we already know.

Jack received a letter from Mr. Bedington, warning him that if his misconduct continued he would be taken away from the school and sent to sea.

As a matter of course, Jack showed this letter to Harvey.

"Here's a lark, Dick," he said. "Old Crawcour has so worked on the governor that I'm to go to sea if I don't mend."

"I thought you'd squared the chief," replied Harvey, "and he was not going to say anything about the highwaymen?"

"No more he is. He was afraid he'd get laughed at for being stopped by his own boys, and getting in such a funk, so he said if I would not say anything he'd let it drop; but it was what he said to my father before that, about the wine and setting the place on fire."

"Well, if you go to sea, I'll go, too, and in the same ship, if they'll have me."

"How can you work it?"

"Easy enough. My mother and father have half-a-dozen children younger than I, and they can ill afford the expense of them, so they will be glad enough to get rid of me."

"Then I'll decide upon going," said Jack. "Is there anything desperate one can do just by the way of a wind-up?—something that will make old Crawcour go down on his knees and say his prayers when he sees the back of me? I should like to give him a settler as the last."

"I think you have done pretty nearly everything," replied Harvey, with a laugh.

"Let's take a week and think," Jack said.

They strolled through the fields and came to the river. An elderly gentleman was very contentedly fishing, but did not seem to have had much sport.

"Killed anything, sir?" asked Jack, who could not help talking and mixing himself up in everybody's business.

"Not much. Half a dozen roach or so," replied the stranger.

"You ought," continued Jack. "There was a whole infant's school upset in a barge here and drowned a fortnight ago, and none of them have been found. They say the eels have been extra fine ever since."

The gentleman pointed to his eye.

"Got a fly in it?" asked Jack.

"No. Do you see anything green there?" asked the angler in reply. "But come, I see you are fond of fun. I shall not fish any more to-day, the sport is not good enough. I'll stroll with you and spin you a yarn or two, that is if you say you don't object to the company of an old sailor."

"Not at all, sir. Are you a sailor?" Jack said.

"Yes, and have been, man and boy, this forty years, and much as the sea has tossed me about, I haven't done with it yet, for I'm the captain of as fine a ship as ever floated."

After this declaration, the boys and the angler became good friends. They learnt that their new friend was Captain Cuttle, staying at Lillie Bridge with some friends, during a brief spell ashore, and they told him who they were.

"It's odd that I should have met you, sir," Jack exclaimed; "because my friends were thinking of sending me to sea, and I should like to go with just such a captain as yourself."

"Well said, my lad," replied Captain Cuttle. "I'm beating up for a few midshipmen, and I have agreed to take one of Dr. Begbie's boys. I have no objection to you, if your father will apprentice you and let you sign articles."

"And me, sir?" Harvey said, eagerly.

"Oh, yes; there's plenty of room for a little shrimp in a big pot," replied the captain, with a smile.

"Where can we see you, sir?" asked Jack.

Captain Cuttle gave him his address in Lillie Bridge.

"When do you sail?" Jack continued.

"In ten days from this date. If you speak to your parents upon the matter, I will take you with their consent, but only on those terms. I would never be a part to a boy's running away from his school or his home."

"They say the sea is a hard life," remarked Harvey.

"Not harder than most others in which you have to work for a living. Suppose you are a clerk, and have to sit at your desk from nine till six. That's hard, isn't it?" replied the captain.

Harvey admitted that he thought it was.

"Your life is hard at school now, though you don't say it, because you're used to it, and think it necessary to put up with it; as for the sea, it is a glorious profession. Where do you find the freedom that you enjoy at sea? Tell me that. But you do as I say, and if all is right, you shall sail with me in the *Fairy*."

"Where to, sir?" asked Jack.

"I'm bound to China, this voyage; and now, if I mistake not, that is your school; so we will say good-day."

The boys shook hands with Captain Cuttle, and the separated.

"Ten days only, Dick!" observed Jack. "It will be sharp work."

"What will?" queried Harvey.

"To so disgust every one as to get kicked out. You must write home at once, and I'll set to thinking of something that will make old Crawcour's hair curl and Mole stand on his head in the dust-bin."

Harvey laughed, and did not doubt that Jack would a short time accomplish his purpose.

Everybody remarked Jack was very thoughtful that evening.

But he had just got into decimals, and it was imagined his mind was engaged upon mathematical problems.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK'S WIND-UP.

THE next morning after school Jack did not make his appearance in the play-ground for some time.

He had the county paper before him, and was writing

letters, not in his own hand, but in one which he took some pains to disguise.

The first letter was apparently written by a lady, in an elegant, running Italian hand, and contained the following:

"To Mr. Burroughs, Undertaker, Lillie Bridge:

"Sir—Will you oblige me by coming up to-morrow about three o'clock to Pomona House to measure my unfortunate husband for a coffin, as I regret to say he has died suddenly?

Yours,

"MARY AMELIA CRAWCOUR."

The second letter was in a man's handwriting, and ran thus:

"To the Editor of the Hertfordshire Mercury:

"Sir—If this comes in time, please insert the following advertisement, for which I inclose stamps, in your next edition:

"A gentleman residing at Pomona House, Lillie Bridge, feels that he has hitherto been wanting in that divine attribute of charity which should distinguish all mankind, and wishes to make amends for his deficiency. Therefore this is to say that he will present every old woman who calls on Friday, at the above address, between the hours of ten and twelve, with the sum of half-a-crown."

The third letter was to this effect:

"Mr. Lewis Crawcour, the principal of Pomona House Academy, presents his compliments to the conductor of the musical troupe now performing at Chelmsford, and will be glad if they make it convenient to come over to the above address at half-past nine on Friday night, and serenade him on the lawn outside his house, without making their presence known until the music begins, to celebrate the occasion of his marriage. Should any one order them away, they are to take no notice, as an imbecile father-in-law, who objects to music, is residing in the house."

Having finished these compositions, Jack went out and posted them.

"I've done the trick," he whispered to Harvey at dinner-time.

"Have you? How?" asked Harvey.

"Wait and see," replied Jack, with a quiet laugh.

Mr. Burroughs, the undertaker at Lillie Bridge, received the letter ordering him to come and measure Mr. Crawcour for a coffin with a sigh of pleasure.

Business had been dull lately in the town, and the death-rate was below the average.

He never doubted for an instant that the letter was not genuine, and Jack had calculated the time to a nicety, for he knew that Mr. Crawcour always had his dinner at two and went to sleep on the sofa for half an hour afterward.

At three o'clock, Jack, who knew the undertaker by sight, met him outside the gate.

"Sad job this, sir," said Burroughs.

"Very," replied Jack, looking melancholy.

"Sudden, sir?"

"Rather; been ailing a long time, though. Mrs. Crawcour has asked me to take you quietly into the house, so that the boys and servants may not make any fuss. Will you follow me?"

"With pleasure—ahem! I mean certainly, sir," replied the indiscreet undertaker.

Jack led him into the house as privately as possible, and reached the drawing-room without being observed.

The door was half open, and Mr. Crawcour was discovered, as was his custom, stretched in a deep sleep on the sofa.

"There he is," Jack exclaimed. "We have left him on the sofa, where he expired of disease of the heart, until the woman comes to lay him out."

"Thank you, sir."

"I daresay you will find your way out," Jack continued, with difficulty repressing a grin.

The undertaker said he thought he could, and Jack retired, and getting into the garden watched the scene through the open window.

Burroughs approached Mr. Crawcour, and laid hold of his leg, placing a piece of tape on his boot, then he seized his nose and pinched it, while he gave him a poke in the stomach to straighten him.

This woke the principal up.

Jumping to his feet, he regarded the undertaker with an angry glance.

"How dare you, sir, intrude yourself upon my privacy, and attempt to measure me with that tape, and pull me about in that disrespectful manner, while I was dozing or taking my post-prandial nap?" he exclaimed.

"I came to measure you," replied the undertaker.

"Measure me!"

"Well, I suppose I'm wrong. Where's the corpse?"

"Corpse!" repeated Mr. Crawcour. "Is the man mad? What do you mean?" he added, shaking his arm.

"Leave off," exclaimed the undertaker. "Read this letter. I was sent for to measure Mr. Lewis Crawcour, the principal of Pomona House, who had popped off sudden."

The principal regarded the letter with a bitter smile.

"My friend," said he, "that is not my wife's writing. I am Mr. Lewis Crawcour, and, as you will kindly observe, I am not dead. You are the victim of a cruel hoax, but I think I know the author of it."

"You'll pay me for my time, sir?" said the undertaker.

"Pay you. Confound your impudence. Out of my house, sir. You ask me to pay you when I am the victim of a dismal joke. Begone!"

The undertaker slowly left the room, but his departure was expedited by a kick in the rear from Mr. Crawcour, whereupon he, being an independent man, whose feelings were much hurt, hit his assailant in the eye, and blackened it badly.

The principal danced about the room, saying:

"Oh! my eye—my eye!"

The application of raw meat allayed the inflammation, but the blackness would not go away, and Mr. Crawcour was confined to his own apartment with an eye not fit to be seen.

He sent for Harkaway, however, and interrogated him as to his share in the transaction, and Jack fairly admitted that he wrote the letter.

"What was your motive?" asked the principal.

"You said if I didn't behave myself I should go to sea," said Jack.

"Well!"

"I want to go; and the sooner I go the better I shall be pleased, sir."

"Very well; do not exert your talents any further," replied Mr. Crawcour, who was not without his sense of humor. "I will promise you that I will make such a report to your father that you shall go at once."

"I thank you, sir."

This conversation took place about ten o'clock on the Friday morning which Jack had mentioned in his advertisement, and a furious ringing at the bell outside the gate took place.

"Dear me, what is that? Go to the servant and say I am not at home, Harkaway, I cannot see anybody. Don't send them in now, I beg of you. We are friends, are we not?" exclaimed the principal, in a gentle voice. Jack had conquered him.

"All right, sir; leave it to me," answered Jack.

He went to the front door and found about seventy old women before the house, and dozens more coming up the road.

The advertisement about the half-crowns had been read in the county paper, and repeated in all the public houses round about.

There was quite a cloud of dust as far as the eye could reach.

Mary, the housemaid, who was at the door as Jack came up, was perfectly bewildered.

"Oh, Mary," Jack exclaimed; "Mr. Crawcour has advertised for a matron, and you are to show them in twenty at a time."

"Very well, sir," replied Mary.

She counted out twenty and ushered them in a troop into her master's presence.

Mr. Crawcour, with his black eye and tearful visage, may be imagined, and his dismay can be guessed at; but neither the imagination or the mind will do justice to his appearance or his feelings.

"My good women," he exclaimed, "what's this? Why are you here? Explain this black and maddening mystery."

One old woman, bolder than the rest, told him of the advertisement in the paper.

Again a ghastly grin overspread his countenance.

"Ah!" he said. "Yes, I understand it now. But I did not expect you so early. Retire; you must all take your turn."

"Shall we wait outside, sir?" asked the spokeswoman.

"Do so if you please."

The deputation retired as it had come.

Mr. Crawcour, regardless of his eye, rushed into the passage, bolted the front door and put the chain up; then he sought Mr. Mole and showed him the paper.

"Another diabolical joke, sir!" exclaimed the senior master.

"No doubt. Where will it end?"

"Goodness only knows, sir."

"I feel already in the first stage of insanity. What is to be done? I have bolted the front door. Go to them, Mole; harangue the mob. Do something, or I shall die of old women on the brain."

Mr. Mole was moved by the pathetic tone of his employer.

He went to the front of the house, and spoke to the foremost of the crowd, which increased momentarily.

He told them that the advertisement was inserted without Mr. Crawcour's knowledge, and that they were the victims of a hoax.

They wanted the half-crown they had come so far for, and when a virago advised them to break the windows, they took up stones and did so.

Not until all the windows were broken, and not a pane of glass remained, did they go away.

Mr. Mole himself did not escape scot free.

They seized him and tore his coat in half.

One woman tore out a handful of hair and brandished it on high.

Another seized half a whisker, while a third hit him on the nose.

He managed to beat a retreat just in time to save his life, and was furious at the treatment he had received.

"Harkaway again," said Mr. Crawcour, as Mr. Mole dolefully recounted his troubles; and he looked ruefully at his broken glass.

"Yes, sir," replied the senior master.

"He must go, Mr. Mole."

"I hope so, sir," answered Mr. Mole.

The day wore on, and neither Mr. Mole nor Mr. Crawcour went into school.

They solaced themselves with one or two bottles of old port, which the principal kept in his cellar for particular occasions.

At eight they had a cozy supper, and in the course of conversation agreed that all would go well if Harkaway was only removed from the school.

"Now," said Mr. Crawcour, bringing out a box of choice cigars; "let us enjoy our wine and our tobacco. My nerves are so horribly shaken that I feel I cannot bear the slightest noise. That detestable undertaker not only shocked, but struck me, and those dreadful women, after their imaginary half-crowns, struck a chill to my very heart."

"I too, sir," replied Mr. Mole, "I feel all mops and brooms, as the saying is, so I will gladly join you in a friendly glass and a social cigar, if I may employ the phrase."

They poured out their wine and they lighted their cigars. Mrs. Crawcour did not disturb them; she was engaged with her own domestic affairs.

"This is delightful," said Mr. Crawcour.

"Yes, sir. This is peace," replied Mr. Mole.

"I have been measured for a coffin, and mobbed by a pack of old women," continued the principal.

"I, sir, have been ducked in liquid manure, and I too have been mobbed by old women, and had my hair torn

out by the roots, while my esteemed friend, Pumbleton, has been ridden on the rail of a green-house, and deluded with the false cry of an escaped parrot. I repeat this in peace."

"*Pax vobiscum* is a blessing. I feel as if some one had said that to me," replied Mr. Crawcour.

"So do I, sir. Your health."

"Yours, Mr. Mole, and long life to you."

"Same to you, sir," replied the senior master.

They filled and emptied their glasses.

All at once they started. There was a sound of castanets and banjos outside the window.

Horrible to relate, after this prefatory warning, a dozen voices struck up a musical air and made the night echo again.

"Mr. Mole," exclaimed the principal. "Do you hear?"

"I do, sir," replied the senior master.

"What is it?"

"Niggers, I should say, sir."

"Niggers? Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" replied Mr. Crawcour. "I have had undertakers and I have had old women. I cannot stand niggers."

Pressing his hand to his forehead, he rushed out of the room and made his way into the yard, where he tried to drown himself in the water-butt.

Mrs. Mole and Mrs. Crawcour providentially saved him, and sent him to bed.

His wife declared he had been drinking and smoking until he was fuddled, and that Jack Harkaway was unjustly blamed.

But when Mr. Mole brought Jack in and questioned him, and Jack admitted that it was all his doing, Mrs. Crawcour changed her mind.

It was some days before the principal showed himself in school again.

When he did he spoke to Jack and told him he wanted him to accompany him to his father's.

They drove over, and the result of the conversation was that Jack should go to sea.

Mr. Bedington called upon Captain Cuttle, and was so well satisfied with that gentleman that he paid a premium on the spot for Jack to sail under him in the *Fairy's* voyage to the China seas.

Harvey's friends granted his wish.

Mrs. Crawcour was sorry to part with Jack, who was her favorite boy, and she, as well as his mother, shed tears over him.

There was another, too, who felt sorry at his going away, and that was little Emily.

Three days before it was the one for the boys to leave Pomona House, an event took place which was just what Jack could have wished for.

If he had ordered it the thing could not have happened better.

Harvey came to him and said, "Jack, old boy."

"What is it?" replied Harkaway, listlessly.

He was lounging in the playground, with his hands in his pockets.

His thoughts were of the sea.

He wondered what a big ship was like, and whether he should be sick or not on the waves.

"There is a show in the town," replied Harvey.

"Nonsense!"

"There is, though."

"What sort of a show?"

"Wild beasts and snakes—a 'nagerie,' don't you call it?"

"Menagerie," said Maple, who was standing by.

Jack gave him a box on the ears.

"There's one for you," he exclaimed.

"What for?" asked Maple, crying.

"Sneaking."

"I wasn't sneaking."

"Yes, you were; you are always sneaking about; take your hook."

Maple slung away, rubbing his ear.

"Shall we go?" asked Harvey.

"Of course. I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll have 'em up in the playground and let the beasts loose," answered Jack.

"But they might eat us," said Harvey, in dismay.

"If they did eat a few it wouldn't matter. Mole wouldn't be any loss, and as to Crawcour, I shouldn't weep over his lonely tomb."

Harvey laughed.

"I thought you had done enough," he remarked.

"So I have. We are going away, but I don't like to be idle."

"How will you get the caravan up here?"

"Easy enough. Give the cove who has charge some money, and he'll come," replied Jack.

After school they strolled down to Lillie Bridge, and found the show on the green.

It was about half-past four and a few yokels were investing their twopence to see the beasts.

"Walk up, gentlemen," cried the showman, whose name was Puffles; "ere's the greatest vonders of Heurope, Hasia, Hafrica, and Meriky. See the lionses and the tigerses, snakeses and helephants; the great big monkey, and the hostrich, and the wolf that lays down with the lamb who lives on mint sauce."

Jack approached.

"Good-day, governor," he said.

"Same to you, sir," replied Puffles, who was fat and wheezy.

"How's business?"

"None so lively, but I musn't complain. If tha beasts did not eat so much, I could hafford myself more beer, and that's the truth."

"What do you say to half a sovereign?" asked Jack.

"What for?"

"To come up to our school at Pomona House, and give the boys a treat."

"How long do you want me to stop?"

"Only about an hour."

"That'll suit my book exactly. You see I want to be on the green in the hevening to be ready for the yokels when they knock off work," said Puffles.

"Right you are. Put the horses to, and I'll show you the way. It isn't above half a mile."

Puffles and his attendant quickly harnessed the horses, and the huge, unwieldy caravan rolled along the road to Pomona House.

Jack opened the gate of the playground, and allowed it to enter.

The horses were unharnessed again, and Jack slyly drove them out into some fields, where it was not easy to find them.

When he returned he found the boys all crowding around the show.

Mr. Crawcour and Mr. Mole were talking in an animated manner.

"I tell you," said the showman, doggedly, "that I'm bordered here. Part the half quid and I'll step it, but I don't move hunder the sum hagreed upon."

"Who ordered you?" inquired Mr. Crawcour.

"A young gentleman."

"Where is he?"

Puffles looked around for Jack.

"Point him out!" exclaimed Mr. Crawcour.

Jack had opened the door of the caravan and crept in.

Consequently Puffles could not see him.

"He cannot do it, sir," exclaimed Mr. Mole. "It's my opinion the fellow is a lying impostor."

"You say that again and I'll paint your heye," cried Puffles, angrily.

"Stay," said Crawcour; "where is Harkaway? He may explain this."

No one could find Jack.

"Please, sir, may I speak?" asked Maple.

"Yes."

"Harkaway is in the caravan."

"Indeed!"

"I saw him sneak in," answered Maple.

Maple, having told his tale, retired delighted to think that he had got Jack into trouble again.

"You little disgiuster! at it again, are you?" exclaimed Harvey, pulling his ear.

"Oh, don't, Harvey, please don't; I didn't mean anything," roared Maple.

Harvey gave him a kick which sent him spinning, and then he ran up to the van, which Mr. Crawcour had approached.

Suddenly the door was thrown violently open, and Jack made a spring over the ladder which led up to it, jumping on to the ground.

He appeared to have had a bad scare.

His eyes were distended and his hair rough, while he trembled a good deal.

The cause of his agitation was soon apparent.

He had unbarred the cage of wild beasts.

But not being quick enough in his movements, he had very nearly fallen a victim to the lion, who had made a dash at him.

When it was too late, he began to feel alarmed at what he had done.

With the usual boyish thoughtlessness, which characterized him, he had forgotten the savage nature of the wild beasts.

Puffles was also terribly frightened.

"Blame me," he cried, "if the beasts ain't all loose. Run, gents, for your lives!"

The boys scattered helter-skelter in all directions.

"To the trees, to the trees at the bottom of the playground, and climb up!" shouted Jack.

This hint was acted upon.

In a few seconds all the boys were perched on the branches of the trees, with the exception of Jack.

He remained in the center of the playground.

Mr. Crawcour was rooted to the spot with terror.

Mole tried to run, but caught his foot in a hole and fell flat on his face.

Here he lay, not daring to move.

Puffles brandished a long, heavy whip, and swore fearfully at the animals.

They were not, however, to be bullied back.

The lion made a jump into the playground and the tiger followed him.

Then the elephant slowly descended the steps, and the boa-constrictor glided down as naturally as if he was in his native land.

Next came the grizzly bear, and after him the pelican of the wilderness, who uttered a dismal cry.

The showman rushed upon the tiger, and belabored him with blows.

Knowing the power of the whip, which he had often felt before, the lordly beast turned to fly.

A window of the house stood open, and with a bound he jumped inside and was lost to sight.

The lion gave an awful roar.

Mr. Mole shivered.

He thought his last hour had come.

Perhaps there was an old grudge between the elephant and the lion.

At all events, they confronted one another savagely.

The lion lashed his flanks with his tufted tail.

"They're agoing to fight," said the showman. "Oh, Lord, they'll both be killed and my show ruined!"

"Stop them not!" exclaimed Mr. Crawcour, laying his hand on the showman's arm.

"Who's to pay me for this?"

"You came here at your own risk."

"But I didn't let 'em out. There's the Bengal tiger bolted, and the boa a climbing up a tree, and the elephant and lion going in a buster. Oh, Lord—oh, Lord, I'm a ruined man!" cried the distracted showman.

"I'll lay a pound to a shilling on the lion," said Jack, with his usual coolness.

"Wretched boy," cried Mr. Crawcour, "this is your doing."

"Mine, sir?"

"Yes; do not joke at your wickedness. Life may yet be lost."

"Gently, sir; look out!" said Jack. "They're at it. Here's a lark! Who'll bet against the lion?"

Everyone was silent.

The lion crouched and then sprang upon the elephant, who uttered a peculiar bellowing noise.

With difficulty he shook off his assailant, who had hurt him badly in the trunk.

Now ensued a fearful combat.

The elephant fought with his tusks and feet, and for some time the battle was equal.

Puffles ran about, half mad, trying to get the other animals into the caravan.

At length the lion fixed himself well on the elephant's head.

But the sagacious creature with more agility than Jack gave him credit for, rolled quickly over and fell on his assailant.

The bones of the lion were heard to crack.

Lordly as the beast was he was conquered, and the elephant calmly proceeded to trample him to death with his heavy feet.

"I should have lost my bet," remarked Jack. "Moral—never back lions."

Puffles now drove the elephant into the caravan, almost crying over the loss of the lion.

"There's a hundred golden guineas gone!" he exclaimed. "Ne'er a show in England had such a lion as that."

Jack went up to him.

"My father is rich; he shall pay you for your loss," he whispered.

The showman shook his head, as if he didn't believe him.

While this was going on, the bear had been smelling about Mole.

He poked him with his snout, and scratched him with his long claws.

Dreadfully alarmed, Mr. Mole got up.

The bear stood on his hind legs.

Mole shook with fear.

"Harkaway," he cried; "come here! Call the showman! Quick!"

"He's on to you sir," answered Jack, "because he knows you use bear's grease, and he resents it as an insult to his family."

Hitherto Jack had been very pale, but he began to brighten up a little as the danger of some one being killed seemed to lessen.

The boys were immensely delighted, for they could see all in safety, as they say like so many birds on the branches of trees.

Singularly, every one appeared for the moment to have forgotten the tiger which had escaped and hidden itself somewhere in the house.

The bear tried to hug Mole, but the latter rushed away and climbed up a tree with the agility of a monkey.

Scarcely had he got half way up when his hand touched something soft.

It was the boa.

Two bright eyes glared into his.

Uttering a yell of horror, Mole let go his hold and fell heavily to the ground.

The jerk given to the bough shook off the snake, and he fell on the top of Mole. Puffles had succeeded in driving the bear back to the van.

Seizing a blanket he ran up to the boa, and covered him over with it.

The snake, from long usage, coiled himself up in it, and Puffles fearlessly carried him back to the box.

"All's well that ends well," said Jack.

Suddenly they heard a fearful shriek.

This proceeded from the house.

"The tiger, the tiger!" exclaimed Mr. Crawcour. "Oh, God! it is my wife's voice."

Again the shriek rang out shrill and terrible.

Jack's mind was made up in an instant.

If the tiger attacked Mrs. Crawcour and killed her, he would be her murderer.

It was through his thoughtlessness that the beast had been let loose.

"I will save her or perish in the attempt" he muttered.

Mole was in an agony of fear, and of no use whatever. The principal was equally incapacitated for action by terror.

All he could say was, "Save my wife! for the love of heaven save her! Save her!"

Jack rushed past him like the wind.

He was totally unarmed.

But his brave, undaunted spirit carried him on.

Climbing up some trellis-work, he got in at an open window, and ran along a corridor from whence the shrieks proceeded.

What a sight met his gaze!

The beautiful Mrs. Crawcour was lying on her back on the carpet.

Her eyes had closed now, and she was perfectly still and motionless.

She had fainted from excess of terror.

The splendid Bengal tiger was standing over her, his right paw resting upon her shoulder.

At any moment his cruel fangs might be imprinted upon the soft flesh.

Bounding over him, Jack made for the dressing-table, where the principal's case of razors was.

Taking out one, he opened it.

The tiger turned his head and watched him curiously. With a desperate courage, born of despair, Jack threw himself upon the tiger, whose neck he seized with his left hand, so as to make the savage-looking head turn upward.

He knew that everything depended upon his quickness. The tiger was completely taken by surprise.

Before he had time to recover from his astonishment, the sharp, glittering blade of a razor was drawn across his throat.

The head was almost severed from his body.

A stream of dark, steaming blood issued from the trunk, and completely bathed Mrs. Crawcour.

One more slash and the head was off altogether.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack.

Running to the open window, he held up the gory head in triumph.

A shout arose from the boys who had assembled in the playground again, all the danger being over.

He was like Judith with the head of Holofernes.

The showman had got all his animals back, including

the pelican of the wilderness, and even that most "amoosin' little cuss," the kangaroo.

Mr. Mole and Mr. Crawcour came to their senses again.

The principal strode into the house, and, seizing Jack's hand, said:

"Where is she?"

Jack led him to the bedroom.

The position of the tiger's body and the blood-stained razor sufficiently explained the danger she had escaped.

"My boy," he exclaimed, "I must forgive you all after this act of bravery."

Then he sat down and cried like a child.

Jack rang the bell for the servants, who washed the blood off Mrs. Crawcour and put her to bed.

The tiger's body was removed, and Jack gave the showman his father's address, telling him to state the case, and he felt sure he would be paid for his two animals.

In fact Mr. Bedington did give him the money he asked, though rather unwillingly.

When Mrs. Crawcour's nerves were strong enough, she sent for Jack.

"How can I thank you for your brave and noble conduct, Harkaway?" she asked.

"By giving me one kiss, ma'am," answered Jack.

"A kiss, you funny boy," she repeated, blushing.

"Yes, ma'am. I am going away the day after to-morrow, and it will cheer me to think of it."

"Stoop down," she said.

He bent over her, and she kissed him twice affectionately.

"God bless you," she exclaimed, and protect you from perils, though your brave spirit will carry you through anything."

Jack felt highly complimented at this, and thought that he should like to kill another tiger.

That evening in the schoolroom nothing was talked about but the wild beast show.

Mr. Mole declared that he was not in the least afraid at any time.

"Why did you lie down then, sir?" asked Jack.

"A sudden giddiness, Harkaway, attacked me in the head, and there was a weakness in the legs for which I can't account, but it wasn't fear," said Mole.

There was a roar of laughter at this.

"Silence, boys," thundered Mr. Mole. "No more talking; get up your lessons for to-morrow."

The boys instantly busied themselves with their books, and the loud talking and laughing gave place to that peculiar buzzing noise which is only heard in a school-room.

Mr. Mole came to Jack and sat down beside him.

"What are you doing, Harkaway?" he asked.

"Taking my last look at Caesar, sir," replied Jack.

"Ah! we have read that together. You ought to be well up in it. How do you like the idea of leaving?"

"Very much, sir."

"That sounds ungrateful," said Mole. "Do you feel regret at leaving your masters and companions?"

"A little. I shall miss you, sir."

"Ah! that is gratifying. Have I then been so kind to you?" asked Mole, with a smile.

"It isn't that," answered Jack. "I'm used to you."

Mr. Mole thought this a curious sort of reply, but he did not push the subject any further.

"You must promise to write to me," he said, "when you reach foreign parts."

"Yes, sir; but postage is expensive. You'd better give me some stamped directed envelopes," said Jack.

"I will consider it. Did I ever tell you that I had a rich relation in China?"

"Never."

"It is a fact, though," continued Mole. "He has a tea garden, and I have always been given to understand that he means to leave it to me when he dies."

"What's the good of a tea garden to you, sir?"

"A good deal. It means independence and a relief from drudgery; boys like you, Harkaway, do not make a schoolmaster's life a bed of roses."

"I am sure ushers don't make our lives all violets," answered Jack.

"If," pursued Mole, "my relation dies and leaves me the tea garden, I shall most certainly go out and have a look at my property."

"In that case we may meet, sir."

"I trust not for any length of time," replied Mole, with a dismal smile. "My acquaintance with you, Harkaway, has not been of a nature to induce me to wish to renew it in a foreign land."

"Don't be too sure, sir; none of us can tell what will turn up."

"At all events you will write, will you not? and so knowing what part of the world you are in, I will take care to avoid it."

"You'll die of boy on the brain, sir," laughed Jack.

"Well," replied Mr. Mole, good-naturedly, "I wish you success. May prosperity attend you, and, Harkaway—"

Mr. Mole hesitated.

"What, sir?"

"You will not be offended if I offer you a little token of regard—a simple housekeeper. I am not rich, but I bought this for you."

He handed him a handsome Bible, with an ivory cross on the cover.

"See, I have written your name in it," he continued.

Jack read:

"To John Harkaway, from his sincere friend and tutor, Isaac Mole."

Underneath was added:

"Serve thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

"It's only a trifle, but you may do worse than read your Bible. I don't want to preach. You know what I mean, and in the hour of danger put your faith in Him who rules the storm and rides upon the whirlwind. That's all, my boy."

"Thank you very much, sir," replied Jack, touched at this kindness of Mr. Mole's.

Mole walked away, and left Jack to his own thoughts. He did not remain long undisturbed.

Harvey came up to him.

"What do you think I've heard?" he asked.

"Not knowing, can't say," replied Jack.

"A fellow told me that Hunston is going on board our ship."

"By Jove, that's bad. Think it's true?" replied Jack, gravely.

"I believe one, if not two, of Dr. Begbie's boys have shipped with the old captain. If so, why not Hunston?"

"I hope it ain't so. I'd rather sail with anybody but that beastly cad, Hunston."

"Never mind, you can lick him."

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Jack. "It's his underhand ways I hate."

"It seems as though the brute was destined to be mixed up with your fate."

"Doesn't it?" said Jack, thoughtfully.

"I say. Here's Collinson coming this way," exclaimed Harvey.

"Wonder what he wants?"

The captain of the school approached the two friends.

"Oh, here you are together," he exclaimed. "I wanted to ask you to come to my study to-night. Can you?"

"With pleasure," answered Jack. "What's on?"

"Only a little bit of feed. Just a sort of parting spread. Three or four of the sixth will be there, and we can have a quiet hour or two and a song."

"A song?"

"Yes, I've got the governor's permission. It is to celebrate the event of your leaving, and to show you that we upper boys think something of you."

"Thank you," replied Jack, much gratified at this proof of the estimation in which his school-fellows held him.

"So you'll come?"

"Like a shot."

"And you, Harvey?"

"I shall be delighted," said Harvey.

"Come around after prayers," answered Collinson, "when the boys go to bed."

The supper was nothing very grand, but it went off remarkably well.

There were speeches.

Jack's health was proposed with musical honors and three times three.

Then Jack returned thanks.

He said it was the proudest moment of his life. He hoped he should always act in a way to deserve the esteem of his friends. He thanked them all from the bottom of his heart and soul.

It was two o'clock when the last song was sung, the last of the beer consumed, and the boys went to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING ON BOARD.

At length the time came for Jack to depart.

Mr. Mole and the other masters wished him success, and when Captain Cuttle drove up in a fly, and the boxes were put in, and Jack and Harvey took their places, all the boys sent up a cheer which could be heard a mile off.

Mr. Crawcour stood at a window, and Jack fancied that he saw him wipe away a tear as the fly drove off.

And so we will follow Jack to the good ship *Fairy*, which is to take him to the other side of the world.

COME ON, DICK. Here's the ship," exclaimed Jack.

"All right! I'm close behind," answered Harvey.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and the tide served in about an hour, so that the ship *Fairy* would have to start on her outward voyage in a short time.

The two friends had come down by rail from Fenchurch street to Blackwall, where the ship was lying.

Most of their kit had been sent on board the day before by an outfitter in one of the tortuous streets in the neighborhood.

But they had brought a lot of things down with them from London, with which the thoughtful care of their parents had provided them.

Jack's father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Bedington, and Harvey's mother accompanied them to Blackwall, but having been on board twice before, the ladies did not care to go again, in the bustle and confusion of sailing, for they knew they would only be in the way.

Mr. Bedington had escorted the ladies to a private room in the famous Brunswick Hotel, promising to go and see the boys on board, and return to them when the ship went out of the dock, and stand with them on the pier to wave a handkerchief and wish them a last good-bye.

Both Dick and his friend were groaning beneath a weight of parcels, and they with difficulty ascended the ladder at the ship's side.

The *Fairy* was a vessel of 1,000 tons burden, and as trimly built and neat a craft as any lover of the sea could wish to sail in.

No one took any notice of the boys as they went on board.

Everybody was bustling about, appearing to do something.

All was confusion.

The boys knew their way pretty well, for they had been on board three times before, and they proceeded below.

Going aft, Jack descended the companion, and Harvey said:

"Where shall I put these things?"

"Chuck 'em down here. Stow 'em anywhere for the present," replied Jack, pointing to a corner near his bunk.

There was a tall, surly-looking young fellow standing by, smoking a short pipe.

He was in his shirt, and his sleeves were turned up, as if he had been at work.

Looking at Jack, he said:

"Are you one of the new hands?"

"Yes," replied Jack, returning the stare.

"Oh, I've heard about you, and as I'm an old sailor and have made two voyages, you'll have to knock under to me. Don't you think you're going to chuck things

about here as you please. Ask my permission next time."

"Next week," said Jack.

"What do you mean?" said the other.

"What I say. I'm a remarkably plain-spoken sort of a chap, but very simple. I'm so easily imposed upon; I was such a fool when I was at school that they sent me to sea to sharpen me up a bit."

"You look like it."

"May I ask who you are when you're at home?" continued Jack, with a stupid air, but giving Harvey a sly wink at the same time.

"That's no business of yours. I'm senior midshipman on board this ship, and my name's Wren."

"Thank you. Do you live far from here?"

"What's that to you?"

"I was thinking what a pleasure your poor father and mother must have lost in not coming to see you off. Do tell me where you live. I feel quite interested in you—I do, indeed."

"I live at St. Mary's, replied Wren.

"Where's that?"

"Axe," said the senior midshipman, turning away with a grin, and adding, "That's Whitechapel for ask and find out. You're not such a fool as you want to make yourself out; and, perhaps, you're clever enough to understand that we know a thing or two more than you land-lubbers."

"I have heard of St. Mary Axe. It is somewhere in the city, I believe," answered Jack. "Thank you very kindly for the information. It has taken a great weight off my mind. I feel better."

Wren stared at him as if he could not make him out.

Presently Jack said:

"In the boot and shoe trade?"

"What do you mean?" cried Wren, angrily.

"Ah, I see; fried fish and taters line, perhaps," continued Jack, with an innocent look.

"Come, you shut up, youngster," exclaimed Wren.

"If I have any more of your cheek I will give you something which will knock you off your sea legs for a fortnight or more. My father's a merchant, and had ships of his own once."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Jack, in apparent astonishment. "I wouldn't have said anything if I'd known you'd been a merchant's son. Did your father really have ships once?"

"Yes."

"All his own?"

"Of course."

"Oh, my! fancy being the son of a swell who had his own ships! Were the ships like these?"

"Merchant ships," answered Wren.

"Great big ships! Well, I never! I'll always ask your permission before I do anything in future, Dick."

"Well," said Harvey.

"Take your cap off. He's had his own ships—at least his father had, and he lives in the parish of St. Mary Axe."

"No, we don't. We live at Dalston."

"I thought you said—"

"That was only chaff. I see I shall have to teach you a thing or two. You don't seem to be over-sharp after all," said Wren, with a patronizing smile.

"I was pretty well when I came on board, thank you," answered Jack. "It was the ship that did it."

Harvey was laughing so hard that he had to turn round and pretend to arrange the parcels, to prevent Wren seeing him.

"Don't," he whispered in a plaintive tone to Jack. "I shall be ill. I'm bursting now."

"Burst then," replied Jack. "I haven't done with him yet."

"What have you got there?" asked Wren, pointing to the parcels.

"Literature," replied Jack.

"What?"

"Something to improve the mind in one bundle, and the rest prayer-books."

"Go on," said Wren, dubiously; "you wouldn't bring half-a-ton of prayer-books on board."

"Yes, we did. They're all for the heathen when we get to China. I promised my mother I'd give them to the poor creatures."

"I thought it was something good to eat, and as you're sure to be sea-sick, I and Sinclair would have eaten it for you, and saved you the trouble."

"You're very kind. I wish it wasn't prayer-books now. But, may I venture to inquire, who's Sinclair?"

answered Jack.

"He's the other midshipman."

"Is his father a merchant, too?"

"Something of that sort."

"And has he got ships?"

"Shut up about ships, you fool. I hate a fellow who's an ass," cried Wren, angrily. "I shall have to lick you into shape with a rope's end, as the showman said to the young bear."

"What did the young bear say?" inquired Jack, pretending not to hear.

"It wasn't the bear, it was the showman."

"What did he say?"

Wren looked round for a bit of rope to give him a practical exemplification of what he meant; but not finding any, he simply said "Shut up," and puffed away at his pipe.

"We'll drop the showman and the bear and the ships," continued Jack, "and we'll talk about Sinclair. Is he a nice sort of messmate?"

"Like you?"

"There's much of a muchness about us. We're rough and ready, and have made more than one voyage to gether."

"He must be nice if he's at all like you," said Jack, adding thoughtfully: "But I don't think I shall like him so well as I do you, because his father don't own ships. Is there anyone else in our cabin?"

"We had six midshipmen last voyage, but only Sinclair and myself are left."

"How's that?"

"Between you and me and the foretop mainsail," answered Wren, "the captain is not all he looks, and he generally can't get fellows to make more than the single run out and home with him."

"Whew!" whistled Jack.

"I thought 'Captain Cuttle such a nice man,' remarked Harvey.

"So did I; and so did lots of fellows. You don't find him out before you've sailed under him."

"How does he get men?" asked Jack.

"Oh, he hangs about schools and picks up boys, and spins them yarns and all that," replied Wren.

"Why do you stop?" said Harvey.

"Oh, I'm all right. I'm well in with the owners, and Cuttle knows he must not say much to me, or—"

"What?"

"Well, I won't blab, but I could say more about Silas Cuttle than he'd like you or any one else to hear. I'm cock of this walk, and if there's any dispute which is referred to the captain, you may lay your life he'll back me up through thick and thin. Is that good enough for you?"

"It's gratifying," replied Jack, "when you come to consider that you've shipped for a good five or six months' voyage."

Wren grinned rather savagely.

"I generally let all the youngsters know I'm master, because it saves a deal of trouble. Sinclair and I are pals, but he daren't say much to me. Weshall, I expect, have five midshipmen as they call them, though you're only apprentices, perhaps. There's myself, Sinclair, you two and another land crab."

"What are you?" asked Jack.

"Well, of course, I'm only an apprentice if you come to that. I had a premium paid with me, but I expect to be third mate soon. There are real midshipmen in the royal navy, and it sounds well to call us so; that's how it is."

"I'm astonished at what you say about Captain Cuttle," Jack observed, dropping his jocular air and becoming serious.

"You'll be more astonished before you've sailed far," replied Wren, with a grin. "You'll have something to put in your log, my hearty."

"What's that?" exclaimed a voice behind him.

"Oh, it's you, Sinclair," said Wren, abbreviating his friend's name. "Glad to see you on board. Thought you'd join at Gravesend."

"So I should have done," replied Sinclair, a short, ugly, shock-headed boy, who didn't know how to pronounce his "h's," "only I spent all my money in Ratcliff Highway, and found it would be no bottle, as they say, to go in for another spree down the river. 'Ard up my boy."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Jack. "You've dropped something."

"What's that, my sea griffin?" answered Sinclair.

"Only a letter or two."

"What?"

"One of those things belonging to the alphabet," continued Jack. "The letter H, I mean. 'Twas whispered in heaven and muttered somewhere else, while echo caught faintly the sound as it fell. Don't you know the riddle? But I suppose you don't. You'd spell horse with an O."

"I'll give you something to say O for, if you don't mind. Look out for squalls. You're a green hand and must pay your footing," said Sinclair, angrily.

"Plenty of time," answered Jack. "I'm going on deck. Step out, Dick."

The boys trotted away, and Sinclair, who looked as if he had not had an hour's sleep all night, and had drunk more than his shock head could stand, said to Wren:

"That's a nice pup, any way."

"So I begin to think," answered Wren, "though I'm not quite up to his rig yet."

"Have you talked to him?"

"Yes. He's either a great fool or else he's been kidding me."

Perhaps a bit of both. Never mind, wait till we're fairly in the channel, and we'll cob him within an inch of his life."

"That's as certain as that we shall spend Christmas in the tropics," answered Wren. "He says he's got prayer-books here. I think it's grub. Let's overhaul his locker."

"Steer ahead," replied Sinclair.

And the two old tars approached the corner in which Jack and Harvey had deposited their little parcels, and began to look at them curiously.

CHAPTER XV.

DROPPING DOWN THE RIVER.

ON deck Jack found his father. Mr. Bedington was looking round for him with a puzzled air, as if he could not quite understand the bustle and confusion which reigned everywhere.

"Oh, here you are, John," he exclaimed, "I expected you would come and meet me."

"I'm bound to turn up like a bad penny," exclaimed Jack.

"I do not think this is the time for such remarks," replied his father. "You have bade your mother farewell, and she is now in great grief at losing you. Remember that you are going away for a year at least, and that your friends are very anxious about your conduct and welfare."

"My dear father," said Jack, "will you kindly remember that I have heard all that before, and that I have promised to be as good a boy as I can?"

Mr. Bedington looked grave.

"Do you feel no sorrow at parting from me?" he said.

"I want to see the world."

"Then you don't feel anything. You are hardened," Mr. Bedington replied, with a painful intonation.

"I did not mean that," Jack answered, quickly, noticing the change in his father's voice. "I only love four people in the world. They are my mother yourself, little Emily, and Dick Harvey."

"Well, well. I only speak for your good, as you ought to know by this time. I say that you are going away from us. I should like to see you show your sense of the separation."

"I'll cry, if it would please you," Jack said.

"There you are again. This perpetual levity gives me great uneasiness. You are like—like—what shall I say?" "A trough full of dough with some yeast put in it, always rising," Jack suggested.

Mr. Bedington could not help smiling.

"I hope your jocular temperament will not involve you in serious disturbance with your future comrades," he said. "In the captain I have the utmost confidence."

"Have you?" said Jack. "That's more than I have, since—"

He paused, thinking it scarcely worth while to arouse his father's suspicion, when he had only heard a hint from Wren, which might or might not be well-founded.

"Since when?" repeated his father.

"I did not mean anything. One of the fellows below does not speak well of him; that is all," he replied.

"Perhaps he has given his captain displeasure, and Mr. Cuttle has rightly reproved or punished him for it. Boys are rarely if ever satisfied with those who are placed over them. I should not listen, if I were you, to such idle tales. Endeavor, my boy, to do your duty, and if you know you are right, you may defy the world."

"But suppose," said Jack, "that you are not one of those beautiful boys you read of in story books, and cannot always do your duty; what then?"

"Then you must take the consequences."

"I'm ready," answered Jack, in a good-humored voice, "and can't say more than I have said; and that is, I will do the best I can, and that I am very, very sorry to leave you and my mother, who ever since I thought about you, have been as kind as it was possible for anybody to be."

"We have tried to be so, and it is now by your own wish, not ours, that you are going to sea. So, whatever result your venture has, you must not blame us," replied Mr. Bedington.

"I shall never do that. I'm big enough now to go on my own hook," replied Jack.

Mr. Bedington looked at him affectionately.

"Recollect one thing, Jack," he said.

"What's that, father?"

"You're my son, and the heir to a fine property."

"I am as likely to forget the latter as not, but the former I shall never, never let slip out of my mind," replied Jack, warmly.

"Mr. Bedington pressed his hand, and a voice exclaimed loudly:

"Any more for the shore? Now, then, any more for the shore?"

"You're off, Jack," said his father. "Good-bye, and good luck go with you!"

"Never fear for me, father; I'm like a cat; I always tumble on my legs," answered Jack.

"You won't worry yourself if you think of the home you've left and the kind friends?"

"Don't fret; I'll make new ones."

"Any more for the shore?" cried the voice a second time.

A sad expression stole over Mr. Bedington's countenance.

He was sorry at parting with Jack, more sorry than Jack was, if the truth must be told.

Captain Cuttle came up at that moment with his cheery smile and his frank, open countenance, which certainly belied the character that the senior midshipman had given him.

"Never trust faces" was a maxim Jack heard, and he looked doubtfully upon his future captain.

"I'd rather have Crawcour and old Mole to deal with," he thought.

"Now, sir, going ashore?" cried Captain Cuttle.

"Ah, captain, how do you do?" replied Mr. Bedington.

"Oh, it's you, sir. Now, lad, bustle about. Glad to see you," answered Captain Cuttle, with a bland look and oily smile, which he could put on when the occasion required it.

"You'll see to my boy?"

"He's right enough with me," answered Captain Cuttle. "Lord love 'em? I treat all my youngsters as if they were my own children. Sorry I didn't see you before. We've half-a-dozen of champagne in the cabin, and I should have been proud of your company. Must wet the anchor, as the saying is."

Captain Cuttle caught sight of Jack again.

"Step aft, my lad," he continued; "you're in the way here."

Jack thought he detected a dangerous gleam in those sly gray eyes which he had never seen before.

"Good-bye, father," he said.

"Good-bye, Jack, and God bless you!" answered Mr. Bedington.

Jack went aft, as his captain had ordered him, showing his appreciation of the golden rule of obedience to orders at an early stage of his career.

In a short time all those who were for the shore had gone, except one or two who had made up their minds to accompany their friends as far as Gravesend, where the ship was to lay for the night, and where they could travel back without any difficulty, as the *Fairy* had to take on a passenger at the last-named place, and look out for fresh hands to supply such of her crew as might be missing at the last moment.

It is not an unusual thing for a captain, when the roll is called over, to find several seamen absent.

Either they have been too drunk to sail, or they have changed their minds after signing articles, and the deficiency has to be made up by the crimps at Gravesend, as a ship cannot go to sea short-handed.

The gates of the dock were opened, and the *Fairy* sailed out.

Jack and Harvey posted themselves in an advantageous position, to catch a last glimpse of their friends as they went through the cut leading from the dock to the river.

"I wish I were like you, Jack," said Harvey, with a sigh.

"Why?" asked Jack.

"My father can't come to see me off, and I think he's rather glad I'm going. We've such a lot at home. He's only a clerk in the city, you know, and it comes hard upon him to have to keep half-a-dozen of us. How he paid the premium for me here I don't know."

"Keep up your courage, old boy," replied Jack. "We'll make our fortunes in the East, and then we'll come back and astonish them."

"Look!" cried Harvey.

"Where?"

"On the pier. I can see your father and mother, and my mother. There they are, standing on the edge almost, to see us off into the river."

"Let's give 'em a cheer," said Jack Harkaway.

"Right you are," replied Harvey.

The lads took off their caps and gave a ringing cheer which Mr. Bedington answered from the shore.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

The beautiful vessel glided slowly into the river with sails set.

Soon the stream caught her, and, aided by wind and tide, she dropped down the river.

Mrs. Harvey turned away and hid her face, as her tears fell fast, and Mrs. Bedington, who had made her acquaintance, tried to comfort her.

Harvey saw this, and he, too, began to cry.

"Dick," said Jack, "this won't do—blubbering."

"I can't help it; mother's looking so cut up," replied Harvey.

"You're a man now and a sailor. It won't do to cry. Look at me," said Jack.

Harvey did look at him.

"Why," said he, "your eyes are as wet as mine; you're crying, too."

"So I am, old fellow. I was only humbugging you. After all, we're only boys, and we can't help feeling it," answered Jack, in a hoarse voice.

But, in spite of their emotion, they kept the old pier in sight and waved their hats, though the figures standing upon it were indistinct, and the only things they could make out clearly were the mud-begrimmed bank of the Thames' low-lying shore.

"Come!" exclaimed a voice at Jack's elbow, "we've had enough of that. No suffling; you'll find something to do."

It was Captain Cuttle who spoke.

The men were getting into their places and attending to duty in a stupid sort of way, looking as if they had not revived from the night they had made of it before sailing.

The officers, however, were sober, and they saw that the necessary work was done somehow or other.

"Touch your cap when you are spoken to," continued the captain.

"I didn't know we were on board of a man-of-war, sir," replied Jack with his usual impudence.

"Never mind whether we are or not. I'll have discipline maintained on board my ship; touch your cap," said the captain.

"Jack did so, and the captain went amidships."

"That's a taste of what we've got to expect," observed Jack.

"Yes," said Harvey; "he's beginning early."

"Rather. I think all that Wren told us isn't far from the truth."

They turned around with a sigh, and unexpectedly met an old foe.

"Hunston!" exclaimed Jack, astonished.

"Yes, my boy, it's me, as you truly remark, alive and kicking," replied Hunston, senior.

"I heard that one of Dr. Begbie's boys was coming, but I didn't think it was you!" cried Jack.

"Or you would not have shipped, eh?"

"Perhaps not."

"You see we're destined to meet, and we'd best be friends; shake hands."

"I shan't. I don't want to be friends with you because I know what your friendship means, and how treacherous you are," replied Jack.

"All right, my hearty, please yourself. It won't break my heart," said Hunston.

And he walked away with his hands in his pockets.

Fancy that beast, Hunston, being on board," said Harvey, as he looked after him, blankly.

"I wish I'd known it, that I do," added Jack. It seems to me we are to have more annoyances on board ship than we ever bargained for."

"It can't be helped, unless we cut and run at Gravesend."

"I shan't do that; I'll stand to my guns."

"What you do, I'll do," replied Harvey, looking at his friend with confidence, "though I can't help saying I almost wish we were back again at Crawcour's."

"Don't turn tail at the start, Dick," said Jack, with a reproachful glance.

"I'm not turning tail, but I don't like Hunston being on board, and I don't like what I have seen of the captain, or what Wren said of him."

"They can't eat us or skin us. We shall be right enough. Don't funk," replied Jack. "Still it is funny Hunston should be here. I've licked him, and can do so again, and he won't play any tricks on us, though he may be a better sailor, as he has been to sea before. If I'm afraid of any one, it's—"

"Wren?" said Harvey.

"No, the captain."

The two boys hung over the side, and looked in a melancholy manner at the river, which was running down in a muddy stream to the sea.

CHAPTER XVI.

TAKING IN A PASSENGER.

BEING a sailing-ship, and the wind not being very strong, the *Fairy* did not make very quick progress, relying almost entirely on the tide.

She was heavily laden, and bound for Canton, in China.

There was accommodation for a few passengers, though she was not a passenger ship, but merely a trader.

Few hands, like Jack and Harvey, were not molested by anyone, and did very much as they liked for the first day.

When the pier faded away, and the friends they had left behind were but dim specks, and then entirely shut out as they rounded a reach in the river, the boys turned to go below.

"We'll put things a bit straight," said Jack, "and indulge ourselves with a glass of currant wine and a slice of cake."

Not being in the habit of looking down on the deck, he did not see a coil of rope, over which he tripped, pitching him into a tub of water, and getting up slightly wet, while the sailors laughed loudly.

"What cheer, my hearty?" exclaimed an old salt.

"I've had enough cheering," answered Jack. "I've been cheering till I'm hoarse."

At this the sailors laughed again, and to avoid their ridicule Jack was glad to descend the ladder.

But he was in such a hurry to get below that his foot slipped.

He lost his hold, and rolled along the deck till he was brought up by a kick from Wren.

"I say!" he cried. "That's a nice way of coming below. You are not obliged to do it all of a lump."

"I couldn't help it," replied Jack, rubbing himself with a dismal expression.

To his surprise, Wren and Sinclair were eating various delicacies, which, at the moment, he did not expect belonged to himself.

"You might ask a fellow to join in," he said.

"So we will. Help yourself," answered Wren.

Jack did so, and Harvey joined in when he came up. Cakes, oranges and currant wine vanished like magic.

Presently Wren and Sinclair were called for, and stuffing their mouths and pockets full of anything they could lay their hands upon, they went away.

"That was generous of them," said Harvey.

"Very," answered Jack. "It's more than I expected. Wren does not seem such a bad sort, after all. Now let's put our things away."

"They'll be safe enough. The fellows won't bag our grub, as they've got some of their own."

"I'd rather have them in my chest, though," replied Jack.

He turned round to open the packages, and to his disgust found that they were all empty.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

"What's up now?" said Harvey.

"Bless their eyes," replied Jack; "they've been and gone and done it."

"Done what?"

"Why, we've been drinking our own wine and eating our own stuff. That's a good joke. Wren said we had something to learn, and it looks like it, rather. First of all I go and tumble over a rope and douse myself in a tub of dirty water, then I roll down the ladder, and now I find they've stolen a march on us and eaten our prog. We certainly have got something to learn, and must keep our weather eye open, Dick."

"It looks like it," answered Harvey. "But it's no use crying over spilt milk; let's go and look about us a bit." Concealing his mortification as well as he could, he led the way on deck again.

Being on board ship was very different to being on shore.

They were continually in the way, and were pushed about from place to place, and once very nearly fell into the hold, as the hatch was not down yet.

At last they got into the steward's cabin, where the first mate, Thompson, was taking a sip of brandy with Smith, the steward.

"Well, youngsters," said the mate, "how do you like the ship?"

"The ship's right enough," answered Jack. "It's the people on board I don't quite understand."

"You'll drop into your place in a day or two, and find everything go like a piece of machinery," answered Thompson.

"When shall we get to sea?"

"We shall be in the channel to-morrow. To-night we lay off to Gravesend, to take in a passenger."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know his name, but he's going out to Canton in a hurry. An uncle has died and left him a tea garden in China, and he's going to look after his property," answered Thompson.

"I heard he's been a schoolmaster, or something of that sort."

"I thought we'd done with schoolmasters," said Jack. "We've had enough of that sort of cattle."

"He can polish you up in your A B C when you've nothing else to do," answered Thompson, with a laugh.

Jack did not quite agree with this prospect, but consoled himself with the thought that as the schoolmaster was a passenger, he should not come much in contact with him.

When they reached Gravesend it was fully expected that the ship would drop anchor.

But the captain, finding that his crew answered to their names, and that he had only to take a passenger on board at Gravesend, contented himself with taking in sail and making a signal for the boat to come alongside.

As the passenger was waiting with his luggage in a boat, the rowers soon put off and came alongside the *Fairy*.

The luggage was quickly hoisted on deck, and the passenger, who was reported to have been a schoolmaster and to have had a tea garden left him near Canton by the sudden death of a relative, followed his luggage.

The boat dropped behind.

All sail was set, and the *Fairy* continued her way down the Thames.

Suddenly the passenger caught sight of Jack's face.

"Stop the ship! stop the ship!" he exclaimed. "I'll get out! Stop the ship!"

Attracted by his frantic gestures the captain approached.

"What's the matter, sir?" he inquired.
 "Stop the ship, I say! I'll get out!" continued the passenger, with increased vociferation.
 The captain regarded him curiously.
 Was he mad?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STOWAWAY.

"Stop the ship!" repeated Captain Cuttle. "What does the man mean?"

"I'll get out, I say. Let me out," persisted the passenger.

"Do you think you're in an omnibus?" You won't have any chance of getting out till the pilot leaves, and then you'll have to pay a good price for being landed at Deal, and forfeit your passage. What's the matter with the ship? The owners sent me a telegram saying you'd taken your passage at the last moment, and I was to pick you up at Gravesend. Have you forgotten anything important?"

"It isn't that," groaned the passenger. It's Jack Harkaway. If I'd known that he was on board this ship I wouldn't have sailed in her."

"It's too late to give her a wide berth now," said the captain.

"But what harm can one of my midshipmen do to you?"

"You don't know him as well as I do. Something dreadful will befall the ship. I know it will. We shall never get to our destination."

"What have you had to do with him?"

"I was his tutor. My name's Mole. I was Mr. Crawcour's senior master, and if anybody knows anything about Harkaway, I'm the man. Little did I suspect that I was going to fall into a trap when I took my passage in the *Fairy*, 1,000 tons register, A 1, at Lloyd's, seven years. Oh, dear me! This was a prospect I did not bargain for when I hastily determined to leave my native land, on the occasion of my eccentric uncle's sudden death, and his demise to me by will of an extensive tea garden in China, near Canton."

Captain Cuttle looked at Mr. Mole, and then at Jack.

The latter tapped his forehead with his finger significantly.

"Oh, it is like that, is it?" said the captain, in a low voice.

"Been so on and off for some time, sir," replied Jack, raising his hand to his cap respectfully.

"Cranky, eh?"

"Touched in the upper story, sir. Got a tile off, as we say. I don't believe he's got any tea garden at all. It's a delusion. He said he was the Prince of Wales once, and wanted us to call him Albert Edward the First."

"All right. Leave him to me."

Jack saluted Captain Cuttle again, and went forward, where Harvey was waiting for him.

"Is that Mr. Mole?" asked Harvey.

"Yes."

"Our Mole?"

"Yes. Crawcour's Mole. He's the schoolmaster who's had a tea garden left him by his uncle," answered Jack. "Isn't it funny that he should come to sail in this ship?"

"Rather," ejaculated Dick.

It certainly was curious that Mr. Mole should have selected this particular ship to sail in.

An eccentric uncle of his, from whom he had long had expectations, had settled years ago in China, and hearing of his death from his solicitor, Mr. Mole determined to go at once to Canton.

He was left sole heir of his wealth, and being tired of drudgery in a school, he resolved that he would go to China and look after his newly-acquired property.

Seeing by an advertisement in a paper that the *Fairy* was the first ship to sail for China, he took leave of his friends and booked his passage.

When he found that Jack was on board he became alarmed lest he should play him some tricks and render his passage uncomfortable.

Captain Cuttle, however, allayed his fears.

"I'm master here, sir," he exclaimed, "and I make every one do as I please. My midshipmen are supposed to be young gentlemen, and if they don't behave like gentlemen I'll skin them alive."

It was a fact, in spite of what Wren had said, that all the boys were midshipmen, and not apprentices.

They had paid a premium which was to be repaid them in the shape of wages, and they could leave the ship when the voyage was done, whereas had they been apprentices the captain could have made them serve until their time was up.

In their cabin, in which they messed together, were bunks on each side, and in these they slept.

The ship soon got into the channel and the pilot left her.

Then she went gayly on her voyage, favored by winds that promised to make her passage a quick one.

Jack and Harvey were down with sea-sickness as soon as they got past the Nore.

Hunston, Wren and Sinclair laughed at them heartily, and told them they would be all right in a day or two.

It was early in the morning when Captain Cuttle was startled by the apparition of a pale and timid lad, who approached him on the after-deck.

He could scarcely stand, owing to the motion of the waves, and looked very miserable.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the captain, sternly.

"A stowaway," answered the boy.

"Have you dared to come aboard my ship under false pretenses?" thundered the captain.

"I thought I might, sir."

"What's your name, and where do you come from?"

"My name's Maple, sir, and I come from Mr. Crawcour's school."

"Maple!" repeated the captain, adding, "who put you up to this?"

Maple hesitated.

"Out with it."

"Hunston did, sir. I always liked him, and thought the sea would suit me. I knew my parents would not let me come, so Hunston brought me down with him and smuggled me on board. He told me just now it was time to speak, but I feel so ill that—"

Here Maple fell sick, and rushed to the side of the ship.

"Pass the word for Mr. Hunston," exclaimed Captain Cuttle.

Hunston came up, looking anxious.

"So you have been accessory to getting that useless worm on board, have you?" continued Captain Cuttle.

"It was his wish, and—"

"Take that," replied the captain. Dealing him a blow in his face, which sent him rolling over the deck.

Hunston got up half stunned.

"I'll have it out of you," cried the captain, furiously.

"You don't play your games with me for nothing. Out of my sight, and some of you take that boy below."

Captain Cuttle was now showing himself in his true colors.

Hunston did not reproach Maple.

He was glad to have him on board, because he knew where Maple was he should have a snack and a toddy always at hand.

But he vowed vengeance against the captain, and bided his time for an opportunity.

In a few days the fresh hands were well enough to come on deck and do their duty, which Jack soon learned.

Maple and Harvey were slower.

Jack liked the life of a sailor, but Maple found out that he had made a mistake, for if there was any dirty work to be done, such as swabbing the deck, it was by common consent given to him; even his friend Hunston did not stand by him.

"You don't seem so lively," remarked Hunston, with a sneer, to Jack, one morning at breakfast, as Jack was munching a ship's biscuit and drinking his tea.

Jack made him no answer.

"Captain Cuttle isn't Crawcour. Old Cuttle is one too many for you," continued Hunston.

"Wait a bit," replied Jack, "I've hardly had time to look around me."

The only two passengers were Mr. Mole, and a naturalist named Blader, who was sent out by some scientific society to make explorations in the Indian Archipelago.

Mr. Blader had with him a favorite monkey in a cage, which stood in the saloon.

Jack had his eye on Jocko for some time, and one day slipping into the saloon, unfastened the monkey, and put on his head a paper cap, on which he had written in large letters, "Captain Cuttle."

Then he turned the monkey up in the captain's cabin.

Jack had scarcely had time to get on deck before he heard a smash, at which he grinned, for he knew the mischievous creature would jump from place to place, and smash everything breakable he came across.

The captain did not go below for half an hour, being a great drinker, which in some respects accounted for his ill-temper and savage disposition. He imbibed little glasses of spirits at short intervals.

Smacking his lips at the prospect of a dram, he opened his cabin door.

The place was in a state of horrible confusion.

A case of bottles was knocked down, brandy, rum and gin, saturated the carpet, glasses were broken, his swinging looking-glass smashed, and many things that he prized lying in a heap irretrievably damaged.

Looking up for the author of the mischief he espied the monkey.

"Who has done this?" he gasped.

Jocko nodded his head, and the captain read on his absurd-looking paper cap, "Captain Cuttle."

Seizing a chair, he darted at the monkey, intending to brain him.

The creature was too quick for him.

Jumping on his shoulder he gave him a claw in the face and darted past him, made for the deck, followed by the irascible captain.

The monkey jumped and frisked about the deck, delighted at his newly found freedom.

When the sailors saw him, and reap on the cap "Captain Cuttle," they grinned and watched his antics with glee, which increased when they beheld the skipper following him.

In vain the captain chased the monkey from ship's end to ship's end.

He could not catch him.

"I'll shoot the brute," he cried.

Going below for a pistol, the sailors awaited the sequel with impatience, though they laughed long and loud when the skipper's back was turned.

It was a capital joke to them, for none of them really liked the commander of the *Fairy*.

Mr. Blader was walking arm in arm with Mr. Mole as he inquired the cause of the commotion.

"Bless me! it's my monkey," he exclaimed.

When he saw the inscription on the cap he could not refrain from smiling.

Jocko giped, and chattered, and danced about the shrouds in a frolicsome manner.

Captain Cuttle now appeared again, armed with a single-barreled pistol.

The monkey recognized him as his enemy, and dexterously leaping toward him, seized his cap, and ran up the shrouds with it.

"The fiend take him!" exclaimed the captain.

He leveled his pistol.

"What are you about to do? That is my monkey, Captain Cuttle," cried Mr. Blader, who really liked his pet.

"Stand on the outside, sir. The beast has made a wreck of my cabin, and, by Heaven, I'll shoot him," replied the captain.

"I protest that you will do nothing of the sort," answered Mr. Blader.

He ran to the shrouds and called the monkey.

"Jocko—Jocko!"

The creature at once came to him, and nestled in his arms affectionately.

"I will make good any damage he may have done," continued the naturalist. "Reflect, sir, that the monkey could not have got loose of his own accord, and ornamented this cap with the absurd device it bears."

"Let him go, or I'll shoot you," cried the captain, angrily.

"I shall not do so," replied Mr. Blader, firmly, who was a quiet, middle-aged man. "I shall protect my animal, and if you fire I take this ship's company to bear witness that my blood will be on your head, and you'll be guilty of murder in the eye of the law."

Mad with rage, Captain Cuttle pulled the trigger and fired.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DASHED TO THE MASTHEAD RIGGING.

An old sailor, whose name was Slocum, happened to be standing near the captain.

Seeing his murderous intention plainly displayed on his face, he kept his eye upon him.

Directly his finger pressed the trigger Slocum dashed his arm up.

The ball flew harmlessly through the rigging.

Finding his attempt to shoot either the monkey or its owner frustrated, Captain Cuttle diverted his wrath upon Slocum.

"What the blazes do you mean by spoiling my shot?" he cried, still more furious than ever.

"Duty, cap'n," replied the sailor, touching his hat respectfully.

Slocum pointed to the sky.

"There's one up aloft, and he's a skipper we all owe a duty to. We've no right to take the life we can't give back," he said.

"Get out you canting cur," exclaimed Captain Cuttle.

"I'll have no mutinous dogs on board my ship."

With that he gave him a blow on the forehead which caused him to fall bleeding to the deck.

The blow was a severe one, as it had been dealt with the butt-end of the heavy pistol.

"Shame!" rose to the lips of the men.

But they were afraid to speak openly.

Some of them had sailed under Captain Cuttle before, and his character was well known in the merchant service.

So tyrannical was his conduct that one ship which he had commanded came to be called the "Hell Afloat."

Mr. Blader had hurried below with his monkey and replaced him in his cage.

He took off the paper cap.

It was a sort of ordinary fool's cap, in which something had been wrapped.

In his hurry Jack had omitted to notice one thing.

This was of the utmost importance.

The paper had contained some article which his mother had bought for him at a shop, and on it was written in a small, running hand:

"Master John Harkaway Bedington."

Taking this in his hand, Mr. Blader ran up on deck.

He was just in time to see Slocum stagger forward, bleeding from the forehead, and supported by two of his shipmates.

"Look here, sir!" he exclaimed, handing the captain the paper.

Captain Cuttle took it and saw only his own name.

Thinking Mr. Blader wanted to add insult to injury he crumpled it up in his hand.

"It's a fool's cap, and would fit you," he said.

"Stay; read the address on it, and you may find out the culprit," Mr. Blader hastened to exclaim.

The captain did so. His face darkened, and he looked more repulsive than before.

"One of my youngsters," he muttered; "I had his character with him."

"Have you any one on board of the name of Harkaway Bedington?" continued Mr. Blader; "if so, the presumption is that he must be the culprit, though it does not follow absolutely that he is. Some one else may have used the paper, though it has his name attached to it."

"It's Harkaway safe enough. Don't stand jabbering there; we don't want any sea-lawyers here," said the captain.

"Captain Cuttle, as a passenger, I demand to be treated with proper respect and—"

"You've got the run of the ship—take it."

"You attempted my life, but being of a forgiving disposition, I am inclined to look over that; yet if this course of conduct is persisted in, I shall be compelled to lay the matter before the proper authorities," replied Mr. Blader.

Captain Cuttle pushed him impatiently on one side, and went to where Jack was standing with Harvey.

Jack saw his fist clenched, and, remembering what he had done to Hunston, which had been a good deal talked about in the midshipmen's mess, retreated so as to avoid a sudden blow.

"What did you dress that infernal monkey up for, and turn him loose in my cabin, eh?" vociferated Captain Cuttle.

"How do you know it was I?" asked Jack.

"Look at the cap you gave him. It's got your name inside. You did it. No lies."

"To the masthead! Away with you, and stay there till you have my permission to come down, which won't be yet awhile."

Jack made his way to the masthead, and put his foot in the shrouds.

"Captain Cuttle," he said.

"What now?" said the captain, turning round sharply.

"You'll send my dinner up," continued Jack.

The captain made a run at Jack, and would have sent him up the rigging by the help of his foot, quicker than he might have liked, had not Jack taken the precaution to go up the shroud and remove himself out of harm's way.

"Monkey meat is all you'll have," he said, looking up at Jack. Jack took out his watch.

"How long am I to stay here?" he said. "It's a fine airy situation, but it's possible to have too much of a good thing."

"You'll stop there until this time to-morrow, and that will teach you to play tricks upon me again. So none of your palaver, my lad."

"By what authority do you act?" asked Jack.

"Say another word, my boy, and I'll put you in irons, by the living Jingo," cried the captain, berating himself with rage.

Jack slowly ascended the rigging and reached the top.

Jack looked down, and having a bit of wood in his pocket, threw it at Hunston and hit him on the nose.

Hunston looked round wonderingly, but could not discover where the missile came from.

From the top, Jack ascended to the cross-trees, and sat there for a time very contentedly, but the pangs of hunger began to assail him, and his watch told him that the midshipmen's mess was being served.

"I'll have a cut at the salt junk, anyhow," he muttered.

With that he began to descend, and, to the astonishment of his comrades, entered the cabin as they were just commencing dinner.

"Has he let you off?" exclaimed Wren.

"Not he. I've left myself off," replied Jack. "The air up there has made me so sharp-set that I could eat a shoal of whales."

"Cut in then," replied Wren. "It's your own lookout, and I'm not one to crab you."

Jack soon fell to and made an excellent dinner.

He chatted gayly and recounted what he had done to the monkey, making them all laugh.

"You'd better go up again before the captain sees you," suggested Wren, who was not a bad-hearted fellow at all.

"He is not a man to be trifled with, as you have already found out, I dare say; but he has already got his knife into you for what you have done, and you'd better keep his swivel eyes off you if you can."

"One more chunk," said Jack, eyeing the beef affectionately.

While he was finishing his dinner Hunston and Maple went on deck.

"Here is an opportunity not to be lost," said Maple.

"How?" asked Hunston.

"Let me go and tell the captain where Harkaway is and what he's doing, and I shall get into his favor, and Jack will get into a row."

"Go ahead then," replied Hunston. "I've no love for him, and he's treated me none so well since we've been on board together, that I should care for him."

Maple went into the captain's cabin and found him at dinner with Mr. Mole and Mr. Blader. With the latter he had made up the difference by apologizing for his hastiness, and the naturalist being of a forgiving disposition, as he said, shook hands with him.

"What do you want, youngster?" asked Captain Cuttle.

"One of my former pupils," interposed Mr. Mole.

"A very good boy. It is a pleasure to sail with so many friends, more especially as Harkaway has let me alone."

"Please captain," said Maple, in his sneaking way; "I have come to inform you of a circumstance of which I think you ought not to be ignorant."

"Very good!" exclaimed Mr. Mole, rubbing his hands, "very good, indeed."

"Mutiny in the ship, eh?" asked the captain.

"Not so bad as that; but it's disobedience of orders," answered Maple.

"I'll tell you once for all, that I don't care for tale-bearers; but I'll listen to you," said the captain, in his blunt way.

"Harkaway has come down from aloft to have his dinner, and he's at it now."

"Is he?" said the captain, grinding his teeth.

"I hope you'll remember it was I who told you, sir," said Maple, thinking he had made a favorable impression.

"Take that," cried the captain, jumping up from his chair, and dealing him a box on the ears. "That's all the thanks you'll get from me for telling tales."

Maple ran away, and the captain followed him on deck.

Mr. Blader ran after him, saying,

"Do not be hasty, I beg, Captain Cuttle. Perhaps the poor lad Harkaway has been sufficiently punished for a harmless joke."

"Harmless! That's your opinion. Leave him to me, and mind your own business."

Mr. Blader fell back.

Calling a tall, stalwart seaman to his side, the captain exclaimed—

"Take Mr. Harkaway, the midshipman under punishment, who disobeyed orders by coming down from the masthead, and who is now in the midshipmen's berth, and lash him to the topmast-rigging. Be off and look sharp."

The sailor, whose name was Davage, went on his errand, and met Jack coming up the hatchway.

"You've got to come along with me, sir," he said.

"Where?" asked Jack.

"To be lashed to the rigging."

"All right," answered Jack, coolly. "It will save me the trouble of sitting on the cross-trees."

Davage took a coil of rope, and, preceded by Jack, went up the rigging.

When they came to the topmast, he tied him up tightly, so that it was impossible to extricate himself.

"Very sorry, sir," he said. "But it's the captain's orders."

"I'm all right; don't flurry your fat," replied Jack.

"But Captain Cuttle may take his davy, I'll be even with him for this."

"You'd have the ship's company with you, sir," said Davage.

The sailor descended to the deck, and Jack was left alone in his glory.

In the heavens the sun shone brightly, and the wind whistled melodiously through the cordage.

For a time Jack did not mind it, but after an hour had elapsed his position began to get painful.

"I suppose it's my fruit," he said to himself. "But it isn't pleasant. I've been deceived in old Cuttle. He's a humbug. Crawcour was a lamb compared to him. I wish I hadn't let the monkey loose. I wish I hadn't gone to sea. What a fool I was!"

The day declined, and Jack's position became every hour more and more irksome.

There did not seem any prospect of release.

"Perhaps Dick will come up to me," he muttered, as he thought of Harvey.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTAIN'S SECRET.

WEARILY passed the evening.

The pain which Jack had hitherto suffered increased to positive agony as the ropes with which he was lashed to the rigging chafed his limbs.

Had not Davage mercifully made the strain come round his body and under the arm his condition would have been worse.

To bodily pain were added hunger and thirst, the latter especially, for the salt beef he had eaten at dinner-time made him long for a good draught of sweet water.

To his parched throat even the salt sea appeared enticing, and he longed to be able to shave himself free from the galling cords and plunge into the waves which leaped and danced at his feet.

There was a gleam of comfort when he remembered that it was Harvey's watch.

About twelve, as near as he could guess, for he could not look at his watch, he heard some one coming up the rigging.

It was Harvey.

"Thank you for coming to see me," said Jack, in a faint voice.

"I've come to do more, if you like to risk it," answered Harvey.

"What's that?"

"Cut you down. All the fellows in the ship says it's too bad to keep you tied up here the best part of the day and all night too. Are you not stiff?"

"Rather," replied Jack; "but I think I shall be able to get down. The circulation in my limbs is all right. Davage didn't lash my wrists and ankles."

"Cuttle turned in tight, I think, and won't come on deck till the morning. Thompson, the first mate, is on deck, and he told me if I liked to go up and speak to you, he shouldn't see me."

"Thompson's a brick," said Jack. "Under the circumstances I'd come down, Dick, and chance it. I'm that dry I could dip my back into a puddle of road water, and my head aches fit to split."

"I should think it did; you had a tidy sun on you for some time."

As he spoke, Harvey cut away the lashings and threw them into the sea.

It was lucky that he supported Jack with one arm, for he had overrated his strength, and it was some few minutes before he could recover himself sufficiently to trust himself off the trees.

At length he reached the deck, and crawled along in the shadow of the main hatch, and so reached the midshipmen's mess.

His first care was to quench his thirst.

Then he looked around him.

Wren, Sinclair, Hunston, and Maple were fast asleep, and only a faint light came in through the portholes.

Wren was tossing about in an uneasy, restless manner, as if indulging in the luxury of a private nightmare.

"What is he saying?" Jack muttered, as he heard him talk in his sleep.

"He wouldn't masthead me," said Wren, speaking thickly and at intervals. "I'd call him Captain Scuttle, as I did once before."

"Captain Scuttle!" repeated Jack, listening intently, "There is something in this."

"For a brief space Wren was silent."

"Didn't I see him with my own eyes bore holes in the bottom of the *Polar Star*? She was lost off Newfoundland. Foundered in a fog. Ha! ha! Crew saved in the boats, and reached St. John's. The Mercantile Marine Insurance Company wouldn't have paid the damage if they'd known what I know. Cuttle or Scuttle, he mustn't talk to me."

Jack drank in every word of this revelation, after which Wren was silent.

The sleeping boy had probably been contrasting his position with Jack's during his waking hours, and the result was a dwelling of the mind, upon what often occupied it, while asleep.

"That's the captain's secret, is it?" Jack said to himself. "A pretty villain Captain Cuttle is! I see now why Wren isn't afraid of him. Wait a bit!"

Jack turned in, "all standing," as he phrased it—that is, with all his clothes on, and slept very well till morning.

His messmates were astonished to see him.

"I didn't think they'd let you run about loose again," said Wren.

"You don't know anything," replied Jack.

"How did you like it?" asked Sinclair.

"Oh, stunning; lovely sky and beautiful prospect."

Jack had scarcely finished his breakfast when he was sent for to the captain's cabin, as he had expected.

Captain Cuttle had been on deck, and discovered that the prisoner was not in his proper position.

He made inquiries without any result, and sent for the offender.

He was alone when Jack entered and glared at him fiercely.

"Is there going to be a fight between you and me, to see who is to conquer, my lad?" exclaimed he.

"Yes, Captain Scuttle," replied Jack.

"Captain what?" roared the skipper.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack; "being aloft so long has made me rather stupid. I mean Cuttle. It was gazing at the *Polar Star* that confused me."

The captain looked keenly at him, as if he would read his soul in its innermost depths.

For a moment he could not make out whether he was speaking by design or from accident, and Jack's perfectly cool and off-hand manner rendered his task all the more difficult.

"Aren't you afraid of me?" he asked, presently.

"No. I knew you wouldn't do anything more to me."

"Why not?"

"A little bird told me so," answered Jack.

"Wren. You mean Wren," exclaimed the captain, losing his presence of mind. You've been talking to Wren."

"He was only spinning a yarn, sir," replied Jack, "about being wrecked off Newfoundland. The ship foundered in a convenient spot, went down in a fog, which fogged everybody, even the Mercantile Marine Insurance."

Captain Cuttle went up to Jack and put his hand on his shoulder, grasping it till he hurt the flesh.

He was very white now, and spoke with an intensity of feeling that showed he was in earnest.

"Keep your tongue between your teeth, lad," he exclaimed, "if you want to save your life."

"My life!" repeated Jack, who was rather alarmed at the skipper's tone and manner.

"Aye, your life. Never dare to talk to me again as you have to-day. There was one about your own age—but no matter. Wren had best look to it. The one I was about to speak of fell overboard during the night."

Jack's flesh crept with horror.

"Go. I have said enough for a sensible lad like you. Don't provoke me too far," exclaimed the captain.

Jack moved toward the door.

"I suppose, sir, I needn't go star-gazing any more," he said.

The captain flung a boot at him, and he retired precipitately.

Jack had gained his point, but at what a cost?

He had incurred the hostility and suspicion of the captain, who was a violent and vindictive man.

He did not stick at trifles, or he would not have fired at Mr. Blader as he did, when Slocum so providentially spoilt his aim at the cost of a broken head.

The horrible mysterious hint which the captain had thrown out ran in Jack's mind.

It was easy enough for a strong and determined man to throw a boy overboard on a dark night.

So he resolved not to irritate the captain beyond the latter's power of endurance.

How he kept his resolution we shall see presently.

He had conquered in the first fight, and was so far master of the situation.

CHAPTER XX.

WREN DISAPPEARS.

AFTER the interview Jack had with the captain he began to grow afraid of him.

Captain Cuttle was not the amiable person he appeared to be, and his true character was showing itself day by day.

Though Jack appeared to have got the best of it, the captain was not a man to forget. His mysterious hint about the midshipman who fell overboard because he had dared to talk about what he knew, alarmed Jack.

He took Harvey into his confidence.

"It won't do, Dick, to play with our captain," he said.

"Why?" asked Harvey.

"Because he wouldn't mind murdering a fellow."

Harvey laughed.

"Draw it mild, Jack," he said. "We are living in a civilized age, and with all the men on board he would scarcely like to risk getting his neck into a noose."

"Suppose I fell overboard."

"That would be your fault."

"Ah, but suppose I was pushed over on a dark night, when no one was looking, and only the wind heard my cries for help."

"What do you mean?" asked Harvey, curiously.

"I scarcely know myself. But I'll tell you what I have learnt. When Wren was asleep the other night, he talked wildly about our captain scuttling the *Polar Star*, to get the insurance money. Scuttling means boring holes in her bottom, so that she may sink. Wren sailed in the *Polar Star*, and I hinted to Captain Cuttle something about it."

"You did!"

"Yes, and that is why I was let off. But at the same time the captain told me that one of the midshipmen 'fell overboard,' because he couldn't keep his tongue between his teeth. I believe it will be Wren's turn next, because Captain Cuttle thinks he has been chatting to me. I shall be very careful what I say this voyage, and when we get to Canton I shall cut and run, and hide till the *Fairy* has started homeward, and then ship in some other vessel. I'm not going to risk the return voyage with such a skipper, if, please God, I last out this journey."

"Here is Wren," said Harvey. "He don't look as if he had funk'd much."

"Well, my young true blue," said Wren, approaching Jack. "You got out of your little scrape better than I expected. Cuttle doesn't generally let fellows off; I couldn't have done it better myself."

"You've got a hold over him," said Jack.

"So I said; but mebbe you nor anyone else knows what that is, nor are you likely to."

"Come here," said Jack.

Wren approached, and Jack whispered in his ear:

"It's something about the *Polar Star*, isn't it, and Captain Scuttle?"

"How did you know that?" asked Wren, much astonished.

"Captain told me. We're like brothers," replied Jack.

"By the way, who was the midshipman who fell overboard?"

Wren turned deadly pale.

"Did he tell you that, too?" he said.

"If he hadn't how should I know it all?" answered Jack. "You didn't, did you?"

"It would have been as much as my life is worth to have done so," replied Wren. "If Cuttle let on about what only he and I knew, since Damer's death, he must be going off his nut."

"He was tight," Jack said; "and I caught him in the tumor. How did Damer die?"

"Damer was the only friend I had on earth, and he was drowned one night in a gale of wind. What's the use of your asking me a lot of questions, when you know all about it?"

"Foul play?"

"Of course. But I won't be pumped; take my advice and keep your mouth shut, or else you'll follow Damer," said Wren.

"Perhaps you'll go first," replied Jack.

"Not I," said Wren. "I don't go and cloak about. I'm too wide awake for that; so sheer off, my hearty, and keep the chain up, or else—"

He broke off abruptly and pointed to the sea with a significant air.

"Food for fishes, eh?" said Jack, coolly.

"And no mistake," replied Wren, as he slouched off with his hands in his pockets.

"A lively prospect," Jack remarked to Harvey.

"For goodness sake, don't be rash; take his advice and shut up," Harvey replied. "There is danger. I can see it now. Captain Cuttle—"

"Scuttle, you mean?"

"No, I don't. I wouldn't whisper such a word, lest he might hear it, and wipe me out—as he did Damer."

Harvey sank his voice to a low tone as he uttered the last words, and looked around him cautiously.

There was no one near.

"I have concluded one thing," Jack said, "and that is I'd better subside for the present, though I should like to wake old Mole up."

"You'll have plenty of opportunities," replied Harvey.

Jack was prudent enough not to offend Captain Cuttle in any way.

He remarked that he treated Wren with marked coolness, and although Wren could not guess the reason, Jack knew it well enough.

The captain thought Wren had betrayed his secret, and distrusted him accordingly.

The ship made a good voyage as far as the cape, when they encountered rough weather.

Jack was in his bunk one night when the weather was more than usually boisterous and the noise made by the gale that was raging woke him up.

It was Wren's watch.

He could hear the steady pacing of his footsteps on deck, every now and then, as he passed overhead.

Suddenly he heard other footsteps, and he fancied there was the sound of a scuffle, and then a despairing shriek came up from the sea.

Jack sprang up and looked out of a porthole.

Was he dreaming, or did he for a moment see a wan, white, hopeless face rise to the surface, and then fall rapidly astern.

"I could swear that was Wren's face," said Jack to himself.

He would have gone on deck and cried, "Man overboard!" but he was afraid to do so. He might be mistaken. If he raised a false alarm he would be bullied on all hands, and he knew enough of seafaring to be sure that no boat could live in such a storm.

If, indeed, Wren was overboard, he was lost without the possibility of hope.

Trembling in every limb, Jack turned over and tried to go to sleep, without avail.

He could not get the horrid sight out of his eyes.

The apparition, if apparition it was, haunted him.

Toward morning he fell into an uneasy slumber, but did not say anything to his messmates, being too much afraid of the captain to do so.

At breakfast Wren was missing from the mess, and on inquiry being made, nothing could be heard of him.

The man at the wheel had seen him at midnight, but not afterward.

As the sea was running heavily at the time, and the decks were repeatedly washed by huge waves, it was supposed he had been swept overboard. Jack had his suspicions to the contrary.

So had Harvey.

And looking mournfully at one another they asked whose turn it would be next.

Jack had not the remotest doubt that Wren had been thrown overboard by the captain in the storm.

He was almost circumspect in his conduct afterward for fear of arousing the resentment of Captain Cuttle, which had been slumbering for some time.

"Poor Wren," said Jack to Harvey, "if I had not spoken, he would have been alive still."

"You didn't mean anything," replied Harvey.

"God knows I didn't," said Jack; "I had no particular cause to like the fellow, but I did not think he would come to an end like this."

The captain did not seem much concerned at what had happened.

He spoke a few words to his midshipmen, and concluded by saying, as he look steadily at Jack, "You must all of you be careful. The best sailors are liable to accidents, and what has unfortunately occurred to poor Wren might be the fate of any of you."

The ship, however, went on her way, and as Jack was very civil and well-behaved, and took care when on deck at night to look about him, to prevent a surprise, he was alive and well, when the ship, leaving the Indian Ocean, passed through the Straits of Malacca, on her way to the China Seas.

The old seaman, Sloeum, who had been knocked down by the captain for stating his ideas of duty, had taken a great fancy to Jack, and taught him many things he would not otherwise have learned.

The first mate also gave him lessons in navigation,

and Mr. Mole induced him to read with him in his leisure hours.

So it will be seen that Jack, through fear of his life, which he thought the captain would not hesitate to take if he offended him, was making very fair progress and behaving very well.

After Wren's loss, Sinclair, Jack and Harvey became friends, and Hunston and Maple were left to themselves.

Every one was glad at reaching the Eastern Archipelago, for it was an indication that their voyage was drawing to a close.

Hunston, who was profoundly ignorant on almost all points, was holding an argument with Sinclair one morning at mess about the position of Singapore, at which place the ship was to touch.

"I tell you," said Hunston, "that Singapore is one of our settlements in the West Indies."

Sinclair laughed.

"I'll refer to Harkaway," said Sinclair, who came down in his shirt-sleeves to have his breakfast, for the heat was fearful.

"You've made two mistakes in one sentence," replied Jack; "for Singapore is a free state, and cannot be called one of our settlements exactly; and we are in the East, not the West Indies."

"It doesn't matter," exclaimed Hunston, annoyed; "I thank goodness I don't know much about these things."

"Then you thank goodness for your ignorance," said Jack, laughing.

"Suppose I do; what then?"

"Oh, nothing much; only you've a great deal to be thankful for," Jack retorted, with a gravity that made the others laugh still louder.

Hunston held his tongue, for he was no match for Jack when the latter began to chaff him.

At Singapore some cargo was delivered, and Mr. Blader, the naturalist, went on shore to see if he could purchase anything for his collection.

He came back just before the vessel started again, with a large box, which he had placed in his cabin.

There were holes in the top, as if it were intended to give air to some living thing.

Jack saw it come on board, and his curiosity was strongly excited.

"Dick, what's in that box of old Blader, do you think?" he asked, as the anchor was being weighed.

"Can't guess. A hippopotamus perhaps," replied Harvey.

"Hippopotamus my eye!" exclaimed Jack. "Will you help me to find out?"

"Like a bird."

"When?"

"After the 'uproar is over,' my pippin," said Harvey, meaning when they were fairly under weigh.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT WAS IN THE BOX.

AS SOON as they could get away from their duties, Jack and Harvey stole down-stairs into the passengers' cabin.

It was deserted.

By applying his eye to one of the holes in the box, Jack got a view of what was inside.

He sprang up with a cry.

"What is it?" asked Harvey.

"My eye!" exclaimed Jack; "I never saw such a thing in my life. It's a snake as thick round as a man's thigh."

"Perhaps it's stuffed."

"You're stuffed," said Jack derisively. "What are the holes for if it isn't alive?"

"What does old Blader want with a thing like that on board? I wonder the captain allows it."

"The skipper, I expect, doesn't know anything about it. Suppose we let it out. Won't there be a dust up?"

"Oh, Jack!" said Harvey, lost in admiration of this brilliant idea.

The snake was a python of the largest size.

Fully fifteen feet long, and wide in proportion. It had been presented to the naturalist by a gentleman who had lately returned from a long journey to Cambodia, and it had been caught while gorged by the natives of Bankok.

Mr. Blader intended to drown it, by suspending the box in the sea by ropes, and then to put it in alcohol to preserve it; but as the ship sailed early, he had not had time yet to put his plan in execution.

The lid was fastened securely with a padlock, though it was easy to undo it by taking out one of the staples.

This Jack proceeded to do.

"I'll go and tell Mole," said Jack, "that some one wants to see him in the cabin. Won't it be a lark?"

"Suppose the beast eats him?" suggested Harvey.

"He's a fool if he does, for Mole's so tough he's sure to disagree with him."

"It'll be all up with Mole's tea garden."

"Mind he doesn't collar you, Dick," said Jack. "The staple will be out directly."

"I say, don't funk a fellow into fits," said Harvey, getting further off. "I've read of these big snakes—pythons, they call them—and they're not poisonous. Their dodge is to fix their fangs in your leg, and then twist their coils around you, which they do as quickly as the lash of a whip twines round a post. Your bones crack, and it's all U P with you in half-a-jiffy."

"There isn't much of you, Dick," said Jack, pausing a moment in wrenching out the staple with his pocket-knife; suppose you let him have you. It'll be a nice whet to his appetite, like half-a-dozen of oysters before dinner."

"Thank you, answered Harvey; "you're very kind. Show me the way first."

"Next week," said Jack, grinning.

"Won't you?"

"Not much," replied Jack; "I'm not tired of my life yet. His snakeship doesn't gobble me up if I know it."

"What'll the captain say?"

"I'll chance that."

Suddenly the staple came out with a run, and Jack, who was pulling hard at it rolled over on his back.

Harvey made for the door, like a startled hare.

The snake, astonished at his unexpected freedom, raised his ugly head and glared savagely at Jack, who picked himself up and retreated to a safe distance.

"Morning, governor," he said, nodding his head.

"How do you find yourself?"

The python's only reply to this was to uncoil himself and glide out of the box on to the floor.

Jack was astonished at his prodigious size; he did not think he was half so big or formidable, and was rather sorry he'd let him out.

"He's a nice sort of a customer to meet on a dark night," he muttered.

Retreating to the deck, whither Harvey had retired before him, he looked round for his friend and found him perched upon the monkey-rail, leaning his back against the mizzen-rigging.

Mr. Mole was on deck, attired in a Chinese bagu or loose blouse, a pair of canvass shoes, and a large sun hat, which he bought at Singapore, as being seasonable.

"Well, Jack," exclaimed Mr. Mole, "now you can sing 'I'm afloat' once more."

"I know that; I could sing the tune the old cow died of if I wanted to," replied Jack. "I'm not in singing humor. But I shouldn't mind reading one of the Odes, if you've a Horace handy, sir."

Jack knew he hadn't, and would have to go down into the cabin for one.

"Certainly, my boy. I am always ready to instruct the mind of youth. Ingenious youth, as we used to say at my esteemed friend, Mr. Crawcour's."

"Rather a change, sir, going to China, and larruping niggers," said Jack.

"I shall behave humanely to my laborers. Larruping, as you term it, is not a part of my programme."

"Chain them up, sir," Jack replied, thinking of the treatment he once received at Mr. Crawcour's.

Mr. Mole smiled and said he would go for the Horace. Harvey came down and exclaimed:

"I see Mole's gone."

"Hold your row. He'll come up quicker than he went if the smoke doesn't cop him," rejoined Jack.

The two boys, breathless with impatience, awaited the result of Mr. Mole's journey.

Presently there was a noise as if some one scampering up the companion-way, and Mr. Mole reached the top, uttering dismal cries.

"Oh! Lord help me! Oh, Lord! He made a snap at my canvas shoe! It's awful!" exclaimed the school-master.

Captain Cuttle and Mr. Blader were walking together, and they came to Mr. Mole to inquire the cause of his fright.

"What's the shindy?" asked the captain in his blunt way; "anyone would think that you'd seen old Nick."

"Worse, sir; worse, a thousand times," answered Mr. Mole.

"What's worse? the ghost of your grandfather?"

Mr. Mole's knees shook and knocked together, while he was obliged to lean upon the naturalist for support.

"There's a serpent in the cabin," he muttered, "as big as a horse, and as wide round as a young donkey. Oh, Lord! It made a dive at my canvas shoe as if it was going to begin to eat me, legs first."

"A serpent on board my ship? I never heard of such a thing. That's a sort of merchandise I didn't bargain for," said Captain Cuttle. "You must be dreaming. It's the brandy and water you've had. Delirium tremens often makes men feel snakes in their boots, and you said he was at your canvas shoe."

"Why, it must be my python," remarked Mr. Blader, alarmed.

"Your python!" said the captain, "are you going to see snakes too?"

"It's a fact. I had an enormous snake given me yesterday," answered the naturalist, "and brought him on board, intending to preserve him as a unique specimen."

"I wish you'd have told me," Captain Cuttle said, with a look of annoyance. "These reptiles are not easy to kill."

"How he got loose puzzles me, but I suppose his huge strength enabled him to force the staple. It is really very thoughtless of me, and I am very sorry Mr. Mole should have been so much alarmed."

Dick Harvey and Jack overheard this conversation with much glee.

"It was touch and go with Mole," whispered Harvey.

"Yes—and blow me tight," whispered Jack, in the same tone, "if they won't have all their work cut out for them to kill him."

The captain reflected for a moment, and came to the conclusion that something ought to be done to get rid of the snake.

"It won't do to let the critter have the run of the ship," he said. "Here, you Harkaway, go to the carpenter and get a hatchet."

"Right, sir," said Jack, running off for that purpose.

"I believe," remarked Mr. Baker, "that you may fire at a snake and put a ball in his body without doing him much harm. What is necessary is to break his back, or cut him in half."

"Exactly, and that's what you'd better do," said Captain Cuttle.

"I!" cried the naturalist, aghast.

"Yes; the boy will be here with a hatchet for you directly. It's your snake. You're responsible for his coming on board, and you've got to kill him."

"Suppose I decline the honor," observed Mr. Blader, who did not seem to like the task assigned to him at all. Jack now arrived with the ax, and said, as he handed it to Mr. Mole:

"Go in and win, sir. St. George and the Dragon forever. You can do it, sir."

"My dear young friend, I will have nothing to do with reptiles," answered Mr. Mole, declining to take the ax.

"Rather than to encounter the dreadful eyes of that awful monster again I would be—a keelhauler."

"It won't harm you, sir. He's as tame as a kitten," continued Jack.

"Look here, my lad," exclaimed the captain, with a malicious look. "You're very fast in giving other people advice. If the thing is to be done as easily as you say, why don't you do it?"

"I shouldn't mind," replied Jack, speaking almost before he thought of the effect of his words.

"That's right. Take the ax and go down into the cabin, kill that snake, and then we shall know what you're made of."

Jack hesitated and hung back.

The terrible risk he would run in an encounter of this kind rushed across his mind, and he was more than half inclined to back out of it.

The mocking laugh of the captain rang in his ear.

"Ha! ha! You're all smoke and no fire," he cried, in derision. "Go about your business, my lad, and another time do not try and get that courage which you do not possess."

"I didn't say I wouldn't do it," replied Jack, growing pale. "Give me the ax, sir. I'll have a shy at him if he were as big as a mainmast. If he should swallow me, I suppose you'll come down and rip him up to let me out."

The captain laughed and handed Jack the ax, which he took with a hand that trembled a little.

Removing his jacket, he stood in his shirt-sleeves, which he tucked up, and shaking hands with Harvey, said, in a low tone:

"Good-bye, Dick. It's odds on the worm chawing me up. I wonder how it will feel inside."

Harvey could not help wondering at the spirits his friend possessed at such a moment; but though Jack indulged in chaff, he was in reality in a dreadful fright.

However, the captain, who was his enemy, had dared him to the encounter, and he resolved to do the best he could.

The "worm," as he playfully called the python, was no contemptible antagonist for a boy of his age, and the odds were against him, as he had truly said.

Mr. Blader and Mr. Mole both remonstrated with the captain about letting Jack embark in such an enterprise.

"Isn't it cowardly to let a boy do such a thing with the almost certainty of being killed," said Mr. Blader, "when there are men about?"

"You're welcome to go and do it yourself as I said before," said the captain. "One thing I know, and that is, I shan't."

This retort compelled Mr. Blader to be silent.

"If it wasn't for my tea garden and my prospects, and a certain rheumatic affliction in my legs, which has just come on," said Mr. Mole, "I would go and dispatch the serpent myself."

Captain Cuttle turned contemptuously from them.

"Ready, sir," said Jack, preparing to descend the ladder.

"Wish you luck, lad," replied the captain, who could not withhold his admiration of Jack's courage.

The men, learning what was going to take place, all crowded aft, and some of them ventured so far as to go down the companion, and look in at the cabin door.

It was a moment of unparalleled anxiety and expectation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STORM.

WHEN Jack got into the cabin the python was gliding about the carpet, and seemed to have the appearance of being surprised at finding himself where he was.

Directly he saw Jack he recognized an enemy, and coiled himself up, raising his head high out of the midst of a large coil.

His red jaws were wide open and his eyes shone like live coals.

For an instant Jack felt his blood freeze in his veins, and it is not to be wondered at, considering that he had undertaken a task at which men presumably brave, held back and were afraid.

As a fact, the bravest men are always ready to own to a sensation of fear. It is their will that carries them through.

The snake realized, as it were, instinctively, that one of the two must die on the spot.

Jack approached him, and the python darted at his foot, hoping to fasten his fangs in his boot. Now Jack could understand what Mr. Mole had meant by saying it made a dive at his canvas shoe.

"Good morning!" said Jack, under his breath, as he started back with the agility of a chamois-hunter; "you didn't do it that time, my beauty; and you are a beauty, after a fashion. I hope you'll have a pain in your stomach if you swallow me, for then I shall know what's going on outside."

Again the snake darted at him, and again he stepped back.

Noticing that it was necessary for the creature to recoil after each spring, Jack ran in, just as he had sprung, and dealt him a blow with the ax.

Instead of falling across the snake and breaking its back, it only cut into the sea, making a deep incision, from which the blood welled up.

The springing and dodging continued with more rapidity than before, and Jack jumped up and down with the rapidity of a harlequin, and the perspiration rolled down him.

"It's hot work," he thought. "I've heard of a bear dancing on hot plates, but I doubt if it's worse than this. By Jove! that was a shave. Look out, old fellow. Now I've got you."

The python's jaws came within an inch of his foot, but Jack perceived his advantage. It was now or never, and he flung himself upon the snake, dealing him a cut about fifteen inches behind the head, which severed it from the body, except about an inch on the other side.

As he coiled up this part fell over, and in his dying agony fastened his teeth in his own coils.

"That's the finisher," Jack cried in triumph, as he dealt him another blow near the head, which rolled on the floor.

Drawing his knife, he stuck it into the brain, and armed with the ghostly trophy ran out of the cabin.

The men made way for him, and a hearty cheer broke out, such a cheer as only Englishmen, in their admiration of manly courage, can give.

Captain Cuttle patted him on the back, and said:

"You're a fine fellow, my boy, and an honor to the ship's company."

Jack tried to speak, but he could not.

The reaction came, and sitting down on a bale of goods, he burst into tears, letting the head fall at his feet.

No one but himself knew what he had suffered in the few minutes that were occupied in his fight with the python.

He seemed to have lived a lifetime.

Some men were sent to swab up the blood and throw the loathsome reptile's body overboard.

The captain took Jack into his own cabin and gave him some cordial out of a case bottle.

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, as he drank the dram.

"You're a lad after my own heart," said Captain Cuttle, filling the glass a second time, and adding: "Drink it up. It won't hurt you. It will steady your nerves after what you've gone through. You and I must be friends, so don't make any more allusions to what that foolish and unfortunate fellow, Wren, told you. I have watched you narrowly lately, and I see you can keep your tongue quiet. I'm not the man to stand falsehoods to be spread about me, and if you are discreet, we shall pull together. If not—well, I need not say any more to a boy of your intelligence."

He gave Jack his hand, and the lad shuddered as he took it, for he felt sure Captain Cuttle knew more about Wren's death than he chose to say.

However, he made a virtue of necessity, and, disguising his real feelings, left the cabin high in the captain's favor.

This adventure made Jack quite a hero. He had all along been a favorite with the crew; now they looked up to him with admiring eyes as well as looks of affection.

This is always the reward paid by men to true courage.

Among those who congratulated him was Harvey.

"I wouldn't have done it," said Harvey, "if the owner had given the ship and its cargo. How did you feel while you were about it?"

"Oh, jolly enough," replied Jack, "when I saw what the beggar's tactics were, I knew I was bound to have him."

Everybody admired your pluck."

"Perhaps we shall have worse than that to go through before we get home," replied Jack, who did not like being praised.

He spoke at random, but there was more truth in the casual remark, as they were soon to find out, than either he or Harvey imagined.

For many a night afterward Jack woke up in his sleep with a start, fancying he saw a snake coiling round him.

The *Fairy* went on her course up the China Sea, and at last encountered very rough weather.

A storm arose and came upon her suddenly.

She rolled about for some hours, and one of her masts went overboard—a terrific sea swept her deck, carrying over the side two seamen, and disabling her rudder and washing away the binnacle. It was night.

With all Captain Cuttle's faults, and they were not a few, as we have seen, he was a good sailor.

The storms in these latitudes are, however, so sudden and so fierce, that even a thorough seaman cannot at all times prevent disasters.

About midnight a leak was reported.

The *Fairy* was drifting about the waves, tossed hither and thither—rudderless and helpless!

Captain Cuttle was out of his reckoning.

By a reference to the chart he imagined that at the time the storm came on they were in about 4 deg. N. latitude, by a 109 deg. W. longitude.

This would place them between two groups of islands in the Indian Archipelago.

Those were the Amabas and the Natuna isles.

The latter islands were about 120 geographical miles from Sarwak, in Borneo, and about 200 miles from Singapore.

Reports stated that the natives of these islands were wild and savage.

The sailors spun yarns about head-hunters or cannibals, and the boys listened with wrapt attention.

It was probable that the ship would be wrecked, or indeed, that she might founder and go down in mid-ocean.

When the captain realized the desperate condition of his vessel, he strained every nerve to save her.

Relays of hands were kept all night at the pumps, and in the morning the dismayed ship rode waterlogged, the sport of the wind, which blew steadily toward the Natunas.

Captain Cuttle, however, made them take their turn at the pumps, and saw that they did their fair share of work.

The approach of morning was a relief, for the storm had subsided somewhat.

Still the tempest had done damage which was irreparable.

A complete wreck—the once buoyant and beautiful ship *Fairy* was at the mercy of the wind and waves.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," said Jack to Harvey, as he went below to snatch a morsel of food, after being at work all night.

"What will become of us?" asked Harvey, dolefully.

"If we escape being food for fishes, we shall make prime joints for the cannibals. There will be hot boiled Harvey and cold roast Hunston, while jugged Maple will grace the festive board of the chief of the savages," answered Jack.

"I wish," said Hunston, "that if you must joke at such a time as this, you wouldn't do it at my expense."

"Why not, old cock?" asked Jack, dipping a weevilly biscuit in his tea.

"Oh, if that's all, you'd better do the other thing."

"What's that?"

"Lump it," answered Jack, carelessly adding to Maple, "Have a weevil?"

Maple shook his head and Jack threw the little insect—which often enough will creep into ship biscuits—in his eye.

"Oh!" said Maple, "you must be a beast to throw a weevil into a man's eye."

"Call yourself a man! That's what you never were and never will be," said Jack. "Wait till we land among the savages. You shall be my chief slave."

"Yours!" said Maple. "Perhaps you'll be one yourself."

"No, I shan't. I shall make love to the king's daughter."

"Suppose she likes me best," said Maple, extracting the weevil from his eye, and blinking over it like an old owl in an ivy bush.

"What!" said Jack, derisively, "a worm like you. That's coming it too strong. I tell you I shall marry the king's daughter, and you shall be my chief slave, while I'll have Hunston artistically tattooed in various parts of his ugly body every morning before breakfast, for my amusement."

A dark form appeared in the doorway.

It was Captain Cuttle.

"No joking, if you please, my lads," he said; "it's past a joke now. Our only chance, as we can't stop the leak, is to drift to shore. Who'll go aloft and keep a sharp look-out for the land?"

"I will, sir," replied Jack.

The captain gave him a telescope, and he went aloft with alacrity, and taking his bearings, kept a sharp look-out.

These words, the first gloomy ones the captain had given utterance to, struck a chill to all.

In a few hours their position had become desperate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LAND AHEAD.

At the masthead Jack amused himself with whistling the tune of the "King of the Cannibal Islands."

He rather liked the idea of being wrecked. There was a novelty in it, and it would be something to talk about when he reached home again, if ever he did.

Still he was anxious as any of the ship's company to sight land, and strained his eyes, with the aid of the glass, to distinguish the slightest speck.

Hours passed and he saw nothing.

Another night like that of the last would settle the fate of the *Fairy*.

Already the crew were worn out with the fatigue of pumping and want of sleep.

To set them an example, Captain Cuttle had himself taken a turn with the men and contributed his share to their united exertions.

It was weary work for Jack to look out hour after hour upon that dreary expanse of water.

On all sides of him was the pathless sea, stretching as far as the eye could reach, like a vast prairie, undulating and objectless.

Presently he saw a dim speck, which turned out to be a bird, which he regarded to be a good sign, and a herald of the approach of land.

When Noah sent the dove out of the Ark and it returned, having no place to rest its foot, he knew that no land was near.

Jack pulled a biscuit out of his pocket and munched it, wondering what little Emily would say if she saw him in his present position.

All at once he beheld something through the glass that looked like a dark cloud.

In time it grew more distinct, and he clearly defined a ridge of rocks.

Joyfully he sang out "Land ahead!" and the cry was taken up by all, who saw in the announcement a gleam of hope.

Captain Cuttle and the first mate, Thompson, immediately reconnoitered through their glasses, and their practiced eyes soon confirmed Jack's declaration.

They conferred together.

"I feel that there is no chance of saving the ship," said Captain Cuttle.

"I can see none, sir," replied the mate. "She is hopelessly waterlogged, and we can't expect to keep her afloat any length of time, pump as hard as we may. What shore, sir, do you think we are nearing?"

"Some of the islands west of Sarawak. I don't believe they are named on the map. There is a group called the Natunas; I think we are nearing one of them," answered the captain.

"It's a bad job; but after all, our lives are the first care. We have done our duty to the owner. Some would have abandoned the ship this morning and taken to the boats."

"We may save some of the cargo, if we run upon a reef."

"I doubt it, sir. If we strike we shall go to pieces, and it will be the devil take the hindmost," replied Thompson.

"How's the glass?"

"Rising, sir."

"More wind, eh?"

"I can feel it coming," answered the mate.

Captain Cuttle's face, already clouded with anxiety, assumed a deeper hue still of dark care.

"Well," he said, "keep the hands at it. We are in the hands of Heaven. If the worse comes to the worst, we must take to the boats, that's all about it. To stay on board, and to be driven on a lee-bound shore if the wind rises again, will be worse than madness."

"Sheer suicide, sir," said Thompson.

The effect of the storm upon Mr. Mole was very

marked. He made friends with the steward, and procured more than one bottle of brandy, which he drank to keep his spirits up.

With an unsteady step he entered the midshipmen's mess.

"My dear boys," he said, "this is a time of peril, and I trust that you are all prepared to do your duty—for what says the song upon this point, my dear boys? It says—'bother me if I know what it does sa.' That's funny, isn't it?"

And Mr. Mole sat down on a locker and began to laugh.

"I say, Jack," whispered Harvey, "Mole's a little bit on."

"Oh!" replied Jack, "I should say he was a good bit gone—half-seas over."

"We can't offer you a glass of grog, sir, for we've had none served out to our mess to-day," continued Harvey, aloud.

"Grog, my dear boys—what is grog?" asked Mr. Mole, with a vacant stare.

"Generally rum and water on board ship," replied Jack. "I like it two parts rum and one water—none of your three water grog for me."

"I was about to observe Harkaway, when you interrupted me with your usual impulsiveness, that grog is a vanity in which I never indulge; a glass of sherry and a biscuit satisfy my moderate desires. What says the song about biscuits?"

"I really don't know, sir," said Jack.

"No more do I; fac' is my mem'ry not so perfect as I could wish. Time was when I had a flute and could claim the savage breast with melody."

"I've got a concertina," said Harvey.

"Keep it," answered Mr. Mole waving his hand with dignity. "At such a time as this concertinas are sinful. We are on the eve of a shipwreck—savages loom in the distance—all hands are pumping. I myself would have taken a turn at the pumps if—if—the rheumatism in my lower limbs had not suddenly attacked me."

"What say the song to rheumatism, sir?" said Jack.

"My dear boy, I am unaware that my song has been written upon so dismal a subject. If, however, I am mistaken, I shall be glad to sit corrected," said Mr. Mole. "Consider, however, the perils we have gone through, how sublimely the waves rolled, and—"

"How beautifully they smashed the rudder and swept away the binnacle," put in Jack.

Mr. Mole smiled, and took from his pocket a big bottle, which he raised to his lips. It was labeled "Brandy."

"Fair ones, sir," replied Jack.

"What do you mean by that phrase? It is foreign to my comprehension," replied Mr. Mole.

"Give us a drink; that's all, sir. I've been on the look-out, and want a drop of something."

"Take it; take it all. It's nothing but vanity," answered Mr. Mole, handing him the bottle. "Had it not been at the earnest solicitation of the steward, who is a good and likewise a humane man, I should not have provided myself with this cordial. Take it away, Harkaway, but—and this I must impress upon you—drink not too deep; remember that your humble servant, Isaac Mole, has spirits to keep up as well as you, and this is a trying time."

"So it is, sir," said Jack, taking a pull and handing the bottle to Harvey with, "Take a swig, Dick?"

"Don't mind if I do," replied Harvey, adding as he looked at Mr. Mole, "Here's luck, sir."

"Luck, my dear boy! What is luck? What says the song to luck?" answered Mr. Mole. "Here, hand back that bottle; I see the form of Hunston in the doorway, and truly he is an imbibor; a bibber as the Scripture hath it, a bibber of wine, and truth to tell, anything he can lay his hands on. I demand back my bottle. Thank you; truly the flesh is weak."

A long gurgle followed this remark, and Mr. Mole stretched himself at full length on the locker.

The bottle presently fell from his hand empty, and the worthy possessor of a tea garden in China, left him by the death of his uncle, snored.

Hunston only put his head in at the cabin door.

"Been at it again. Sorry for his tea garden he speaks of," he exclaimed, pointing to Mole.

"If you want to know, you can ask him," said Jack.

"All right. I only came to tell you that the position of the ship is considered so desperate that orders have been given to man the boats."

"Go on," said Jack, "you're chaffing."

"Perhaps I am, and perhaps I am not," answered Hunston.

"Well, it isn't a thing to chaff about."

"Did I say it was?"

Maple was just behind Hunston, and he said in a whisper:

"What do you want to tell them anything about it for?"

"They'll be drowned if—"

"Would that be any loss? didn't he check you just now as he always does?" interrupted Maple, who was of the same vindictive and sneaking disposition as when he was at Mr. Crawcour's.

"I don't care twopence for either of them," replied Hunston, "you know that as well as I do."

"Let them alone then."

Jack began to think that there might be something in what Hunston had said.

"Look here, old man, if I'm wanted on deck," he cried, "I'll come, but I haven't had a wink of sleep all night. I've been turn on and turn off hard at the pumps for twelve hours, and I'm very tired. I want to have a pitch somewhere for an hour or two."

"Have it then," said Hunston.

"No. Were you in earnest or not about the boats being manned?"

Hunston hesitated.

"Say no," whispered Maple, "and if they stop here, they'll be left on board. You know Captain Cuttle told us to go and get all hands up from below. Do as I tell you. What do you care for Harkaway? He has no power over you, has he?"

"Not he," replied Hunston, adding in a louder tone, "It was only my humbug. The ship's right enough."

"Is it?" said Jack; then don't you joke like that again, or I'll lick you with a rope's end, Mr. Hunston; I don't like such chaff. We may all be in heaven in a few hours' time, for what you know."

"You won't be there," said Maple, peeping over Hunston's shoulders.

"You mean I shan't meet you there," cried Jack, shying a biscuit at Maple, which hit him on the ear, and made it tingle till he howled again.

Hunston and Maple went away, and shut the door of the cabin.

The key was on the outside, and it caught Maple's attention.

"Lock them in," he exclaimed.

"What?" said Hunston.

"Keep them in the cabin, and then we shall be sure of not being worried any more by them, because they'll go down with the ship. You heard the captain say he could not live much longer in this sea. The wind is as bad as it was last night, and threatens to get worse."

Hunston caught at the idea, and turned the key in the lock as noiselessly as possible.

What Maple had stated was the truth.

Captain Cuttle and Mr. Thompson, the first mate, had determined to abandon the ship.

She was fully covered by insurance, and rather than risk being wrecked on the unknown—to them—shores of the Natuna Islands, and cast among the inhospitable and savage natives, they decided to take to the boats.

The boats were launched with great difficulty, as the sea ran very high, and with wind and tide there was danger of their being stove in.

Hunston and Maple made haste to get to the companion.

They had not ascended more than five steps before the vessel shipped a heavy sea, which ran in a volume down the hatch, and striking the boys, hurled them backward.

Stunned and bleeding, they lay on the deck deprived of sense or motion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WRECKED.

THE first boat, containing the captain and several of the crew, had been successfully launched, and cleared the ship.

But the second was not so fortunate.

In it were the first and second mates and the remainder of the crew.

A wave dashed it against the side of the ship. It heeled over, filled, and turned bottom up.

Dreadful cries ascended to Heaven. Wretched men struggled for a brief space in the water, and then all was still.

Hearing the cries, Jack looked out of the porthole and saw his shipmates drowning.

"Dick," he cried, in alarm, "they have taken to the boats."

"The ship's launch is stove in. Hunston wasn't chaffing after all."

He rushed to the door of the cabin only to find it fastened, and made frantic efforts to open it.

"We're fastened in," he cried. "Hunston must have done this."

Pale with rage and fear, he increased his endeavors to force a way out, which he at last succeeded in doing, by the help of his thick boots.

He literally kicked his way out.

Hunston and Maple were just recovering their senses.

Shaking the former, Jack said, "What is the meaning of this?"

With a vacant stare, Hunston looked sullenly at him, but made no answer.

Rushing on deck, Jack saw the boat in which the captain was gradually growing smaller as distance separated it from the doomed ship.

He shouted himself hoarse and made signals, but without avail. His shipmates could not have come back to his rescue if they had been desirous of doing so.

At such a time all the selfishness in men's nature comes to the surface.

The ship was deserted.

With a tremor of the heart, Jack realized the fact, and he gazed dismally at the pieces of the broken boat, which were tossing about in wanton sport by the wild waves.

Hunston and Maple were caught in their own trap.

Sent below to bring up any who might be unaware of Captain Cuttle's intention to abandon the ship, they had endeavored to seal the fate of Jack, Harvey and Mr. Mole.

The wave which knocked them insensible at the foot of the companion ladder was proper retribution, and now they were destined to share those dangers to which they would have condemned their messmates.

Harvey, who had followed Jack, stood by his side, sharing his fears and blank looks.

Cast away, at it were, in the middle of an almost unknown sea, in a waterlogged vessel, which even then was a wreck, their prospect was indeed miserable.

"Go down below, Dick, and shy a bucket of water over Mole," said Jack, "and bring him into the captain's cabin. We must hold council, and see what is to be done."

Harvey obeyed orders with alacrity, and succeeded, after thoroughly dousing Mr. Mole, in rousing that gentleman to a sense of his position.

He was about to apply his lips again to the brandy bottle, but Harvey threw it on the floor and broke it.

"This is not a time for drinking, sir," he exclaimed: "we are left to ourselves, and the ship is sinking."

"Bless me! where is the captain?" exclaimed Mr. Mole. "I will go and remonstrate with him."

He staggered into the captain's cabin, where he saw Jack sitting at a table. Hunston and Maple were standing sheepishly before him.

"What is this I hear, Harkaway?" asked Mr. Mole.

"We five are the only souls on board this ship," answered Jack; "and as some one must take the lead, I have made myself captain. If any one refuses to obey my orders, I will shoot him with one of Captain Cuttle's pistols."

He placed one before him as he spoke.

"Very improper conduct of the captain to leave me here," remarked Mr. Mole. "I am a passenger, and the proprietor of a tea garden in China. My life is too precious to be intrusted to a parcel of boys."

"Mr. Mole," replied Jack, sternly, "understand that in the face of our common danger—"

"Uncommon danger," hazarded Mr. Mole.

"Our positions are reversed," continued Jack, not heeding his interruption, "and, please God, I will take successful command of this ship and run her ashore somewhere. The cargo is chiefly cotton goods, and I hope she will float. If you must behave like an old woman instead of a man, go to bed."

"Harkaway," cried Mr. Mole, with drunken gravity, "this language to me is unseemly. It was I who taught your young ideas how to shoot. Talking of shooting reminds me that pistols are dangerous. Remove that pistol—you will not? Very well; a time will come. You called me an old woman—I shall not forget you. Mr. Crawcour shall hear of this."

"He thinks he's back again at Pomona House," said Harvey.

"Danger," continued the inebriated schoolmaster. "What do boys know about danger? The ship's all ri'; I'm all ri'; but the winds blow. It pleases them and doesn't hurt us. I shall go and turn in. Call me when the bell strikes for dinner."

And he rolled away to his bunk with an unsteady gait.

"There's not much help to be expected from him," said Jack. "We are in the hands of Providence, and as we have sighted land we may hope. As for you, Hunston, and you, Maple, you tried to murder Harvey and myself."

"We—," began Hunston.

"Be silent!" cried Jack, authoritatively. "I am captain here. By leaving us in the ship when all the others were going, you were guilty of intent to murder, and when the time comes you shall see that I can repay my debts with interest."

"I am very sorry," said Maple. "It was Hunston who did it."

"You crammer," replied Hunston, "you suggested it to me. I should have been off in the first boat with Sinclair, if it had not been for you; and to show you, Harkaway, that I wish to make amends, tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"You can do nothing," answered Jack; "at the pumps your strength would not be of much use. My opinion is that the ship has taken in as much water as she will. The captain abandoned her too soon, but it's all of a piece with his antecedents. All I want you and Maple to do is to clear out; get out of my sight, for I hate to look at you; only mind one thing, don't play any more tricks, for if you do, by Heaven, I'll shoot you."

The boys slunk out of the cabin, and Jack was alone with Harvey.

"We're in for it," said the latter.

"So long as we can drift ashore I don't care," remarked Jack, thoughtfully.

"While there's life there's hope."

"So there is."

"I'm peckish. We must keep up our strength. Go to the steward's cabin, and see what you can find. They killed some fowls yesterday."

Harvey went away and presently returned with a couple of cold roast fowls and the remains of a ham, of which they partook heartily, washing down the repast with some bottled ale.

"That's the stuff, Dick," said Jack. "I don't believe in spirits when you've got to keep your wits about you. What's the time?"

"Harvey looked at the clock. It had stopped.

"I should guess it is about three," he said.

"Then at the rate we are being driven by the tide we shall strike about midnight—an awkward time, but there's no help for it."

"About those islands—are there not always coral reefs?"

"Nearly always."

"Then we shall be some distance from the shore. Why not set Hunston and Maple to work, making a raft," suggested Harvey.

"Not half a bad idea. If we can save some of the stores, and knock up a camp, we shall be all right, though we are rather out of the course of ships and many look forward for a long captivity if we fall into the hands of the natives," answered Jack.

"Are they cannibals?"

"Some of them are, and the Malays are terrible pirates. Still we needn't funk. It's better to be here than in the boat that went down—poor fellows they are all gone to their account."

"Mole will be ashamed of himself when he comes to," remarked Harvey.

"So he ought, the beast," Jack answered indignantly. Jack was one of those who are entirely fitted out to take the lead in anything and everything.

It has been well said that some are born to command, others to obey.

The only man left on board, who ought to have been of use by his matured judgment and ripe experience, was incapacitated, by indulgence in drink—of all vices the most injurious and debasing.

The position of the boys was extremely critical.

Every wave that struck the ship threatened to knock her to pieces, and without boats, what help could there be for those on board if she foundered in deep water?

Going on deck, Jack set Hunston and Maple to work, directing their efforts, and helping them occasionally.

Before night fell a large serviceable raft was constructed, and they waited with impatience for what would happen next.

They made out the land distinctly now.

A strong current seemed to have set into the shore in which the ship was caught, for she moved with greater quickness, and in a straight line, instead of rolling about,

first this way and then that, with every turn of the wind.

The land was low-lying, and a heavy surf broke on the beach, and from the white clouds of spray that dashed into the air, about the distance of a mile and a half from the beach, they fancied there must be a ledge of rocks straight ahead of them.

"Sleep is out of the question," said Jack; "we must keep on the look-out—ready to launch the raft, if she goes to pieces when she strikes."

The moments passed anxiously.

Drenched with spray, and worn out for want of sleep, the boys looked ill and haggard.

In that hot region the air was warm, though not sultry, and they did not experience any of the evils which attend upon severe cold.

The current in which the ship was involved set in shoreward, and in the clear, beautiful moonlight, the boys could see her gradually nearing the line of surf.

So imminent grew the danger that Jack exclaimed:

"One of you go below and wake Mr. Mole; bring him on deck, drunk or sober."

Harvey set out to execute this mission.

Mr. Mole had turned in "all standing," and when roughly shaken jumped out of his bunk in a fright.

"You'll have no dinner to-day, sir," replied Harvey, "except what you can cadge anywhere."

"Cadage," repeated Mr. Mole, "that is not a word in my dictionary. Your tendency to slang, Harvey, will bring you to a bad end. If there's no dinner, why rouse me from my sweet and refreshing slumber?"

"Because the ship is deserted, and we shall strike almost directly on the rocks."

So emphatically and earnestly did Harvey speak that Mr. Mole began slowly to comprehend the position in which they were placed.

"If they have all gone, why did they leave me?" he inquired.

"You'd best ask them. I don't know," replied Harvey.

"Who is managing the ship?"

"Jack is, as well as he can, though she is not capable of much management. We've got a raft made, and that's all we can do."

"Where are the boats?"

"One is stove in, and the other is gone off with the captain and part of the crew."

"The danger is pressing. I will come on deck and support you with my presence in this trying emergency," said Mr. Mole.

Harvey did not care much for his presence, but was glad that he was sober enough to save him the trouble of carrying him up.

When they reached the deck the scene was a grand one.

The moon was rising high in the heavens, and the wind had somewhat subsided, though the ocean was in a state of perturbation.

Every wave broke splendidly over the rocks ahead, and a cloud of spray dashed high into the air.

Suddenly Jack cried out:

"Mind yourselves, it's coming."

And, in a few seconds, the ship trembled from stem to stern.

She had struck.

Fortunately the wave which carried her on to the coral reef had placed her in a high position; and, though the waves broke over her in constant succession, she did not go to pieces.

The boys sheltered themselves as well as they could, and Mr. Mole, after he had been twice taken off his legs, followed their example.

"Shall we launch the raft?" asked Harvey.

"Not till this sea is over," answered Hunston. "I am an old sailor, you know, and if you take my advice you will remain where you are. Stick to the ship as long as she will hold together."

It was impossible to go below now, as each wave dashed into the hold and filled the ship. All the boys could do was to hang on with might and main and wait for a cessation in the war in the elements.

By morning they might hope for a calmer sea.

"This is painful," said Mr. Mole, as a small quarter-eask rolled up against his legs and he rubbed his shins.

"Hold tight, sir, or else you'll be food for fishes," cried Jack.

"It's all very well, my young friend, to say 'Hold on,'" replied Mr. Mole, "when you have had your shins hurt and your arms are every now and then wrenched from their sockets."

"That's nothing," answered Jack; "my shins were barked long ago, and I don't know whether I have my arms or not."

"Truly a draught of brandy would revive me. Oh!"

The latter exclamation was caused by a huge wave, which struck him in the face and filled his mouth with water.

"Won't that do as well?" asked Jack, when the water had rolled off.

"It is nauseous; very much so. Brine is not exhilarating; far from it."

"Look out, sir; there's another coming!" replied Harvey, turning his back to the wave.

Mr. Mole was not so fortunate; he received it broadside on, and spluttered dreadfully.

"If this goes on I shall never get the salt out of my system," he said. "Pickled pork shall be nothing to me. If you love me, Harkaway, go below and get me a drink of something."

"And be drowned in the attempt. Thank you, answered Jack, "I'd rather not. Hang on till morning, and it will be all right."

"Morning is far distant. I shall be pickled before then," groaned Mr. Mole.

However there was no help for it, and the boys had to "hang on," as Jack phrased it, for dear life, while the waves at intervals dashed over the devoted ship.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RAFT.

IMPATIENTLY the boys waited for morning to dawn, and when it did the scene which met their eyes presented a singular contrast to the horrors of the day before.

The sea was comparatively calm. No rain fell. A warm glowing sun shone out in all the fierceness of tropical splendor.

It was found that the vessel, though waterlogged, was placed by the violence of the storm in a hollow base in the reef.

Her store-rooms were free from water, and though their contents were somewhat damaged by the sea, there was reasonable expectation that a large quantity of provisions and stores would be available for their use.

When the storm abated and the dawn broke, Jack looked around him.

Mr. Mole had fallen asleep on the deck; so had Hunston and Maple; only Jack and Harvey remained awake.

"Nice fellows to help a lame dog over a stile, aren't they," said Jack, sarcastically.

"What are we to do now?" asked Harvey.

"I'll tell you, for I've been thinking all night. The storm is over, the ship is high, if not dry, and she'll live where she is till the next storm comes."

"When will that be?"

"Who can say? In these beastly latitudes storms come on, of their own free will, at any time. The island we see before us looks as if it was deserted. All the better; there will be no niggers to eat us up."

"Don't," said Harvey, with a shudder.

"I didn't mean to funk you," continued Jack, "but you can't trust the inhabitants you find on those outlying islands in the China Sea. We must launch the raft and take a lot of things on shore, and build a castle in which we can put our stores, because everything must be saved from the ship that is possible to carry away, and we have no time to lose. Another storm will finish the old *Fairy*."

"I wonder where Captain Cuttle is," remarked Harvey.

"Perhaps he's made some land."

"He'd have been glad if he had remained on board if he could see us now."

"I'm very glad he didn't," said Jack. "He is a selfish, dangerous, bad man. The way in which he left the ship showed that he cared for nobody but himself. We've got the island we see before us to ourselves."

"If there are no niggers."

"If the niggers, as you call them, don't show themselves for a few days, I'll make a castle that will enable us to defy any number of them, and we'll call it Jack's castle," answered Jack.

"May I have a nap somewhere? I'm dead beat," exclaimed Harvey, with another yawn, as he rubbed his eyes with his knuckles.

"Not yet; dive into the cabin and bring up what you can find. Something to eat and drink will make us both right—or, stop a bit. I'll come with you."

They went below together and found something to satisfy their hunger with, and lighting a fire, they made some tea, which was very refreshing.

"Now to work," said Jack.

"Right you are," replied Harvey; "I feel another man."

"You'll stick to me, Dick," cried Jack, who looked at a pistol he had in his pocket.

"Never fear," replied Harvey again.

"I'm captain now, and you are my lieutenant. I'm not going to stand any nonsense from anybody."

"Give your orders," said Harvey, laughing.

"Go and kick Mole, Hunston and Maple in the ribs till you awake them."

"Right."

"I find the brains and they'll have to find arms. In other words they'll have to do their work."

"I'll lay into Mole first," said Harvey, "and then I'll let Hunston and his dirty snake, Maple, have it."

He went away grinning, as if he liked the idea of the task he had taken in hand.

A vigorous kick in the side roused Mr. Mole, who sprang to his feet and looked wildly around him.

"Where are we?" he cried; and what is the meaning of this outrage? Harvey, you kicked me; are you aware that you actually had the hardihood to kick, in the neighborhood of the fifth rib, your late respected senior master, and the proprietor of innumerable Hyson shrubs in a China tea garden near Canton?"

"Captain's orders, sir," replied Harvey.

"The captain I thought all but ourselves had left the ship."

Jack made his appearance, and said:

"I have made myself the captain, Mr. Mole, and I shall act with the utmost severity to those who refuse to obey me."

Hunston and Maple had been roused by Harvey, and stood sleepily surveying the scene, which was a lovely one.

While they had been slumbering some magician seemed to have shaken his wand, and the whole situation had been changed.

Wind had given place to a gentle breeze; huge waves were now ripples. Black clouds gave way to a bright sunlit sky, and inside the coral reef the water was calm as a mill-pond.

Mr. Mole was carried away by the situation.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed, "we have been saved by a miracle from a watery grave, yet we do not know what dangers may confront us. You are singularly fortunate in having me to direct your efforts; with mature judgment and ripe experience, you will find me a tower of strength, and—"

"It seems to me, Mr. Mole, that you do not know what you are saying; and as this is a time for acting, and not talking, you may oblige me by helping to launch the raft," replied Jack. "Now then, Hunston, wake up. Lend a hand, Maple."

"I want some breakfast," replied Hunston.

"Happy thought!" exclaimed Mr. Mole. "The inner man begins to rumble, and thereby gives warning that there is a hollow space which wants filling up."

"It will have to wait," answered Jack, "until the raft has been to the island and back. I'll stand no nonsense. My orders must be obeyed."

So determined was Jack's manner that the raft was launched, and several things which it was considered would be of the first importance were placed upon it.

"Now, then," cried Jack, "steady all, away we go."

As they were about to push off they heard a whining noise.

"That's the captain's dog Nero," said Harvey. "He's in the cabin. It's a wonder he wasn't drowned."

"Go and cut him loose. A good watch-dog will be just the thing we want," replied Jack.

Nero was a fine specimen of the black, curly-haired retriever, and when Harvey cut the rope which fastened him, he rushed on deck, and springing on the raft, caressed the boys, who had always been kind to him, with every demonstration of affection.

After this the raft was not long in reaching the shore, it being propelled by a light wind and the sail which Jack hoisted.

A small inlet or creek was espied, and up this the raft was pushed with a long pole, until a landing-place was reached.

Jack sprang ashore, and sticking the pole in the earth, cried:

"I take possession of this island in the name of our gracious sovereign. Hurrah for the Queen!"

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried everybody, except Mr. Mole, who had been overhauling the luggage, as he called what had been placed on the raft, and discovered a case of spirits, a bottle of which he was raising to his lips.

Jack saw this, and, snatching the bottle from him, exclaimed:

"At it again are you? Say 'Hurrah for the Queen!'"

"God save the Queen!" cried Mr. Mole, adding, "Don't be so violent, Harkaway. I'm sure I'm as loyal as anybody, but after what we have gone through we must keep our spirits up."

"When you've earned your rations you shall have them, not before," replied Jack. "I shall call this Harkaway Island. Dick, light a fire, and give them something to eat and drink, while I go inland and explore a place for us to pitch our tent."

Leaving his lieutenant to follow his instructions, Jack climbed up a sandhill and commenced his exploring expedition.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BUILDING JACK'S CASTLE.

If Jack had not been so anxious his walk would have been a delightful one.

The island on which his lot had been cast was well wooded, and the vegetation rank and luxuriant.

As he struck inland he came upon a grove of tall trees, mixed with cocoa and betelnut palms.

It is scarcely possible to convey an idea of the rich grouping of the palms and shrubbery and festooning vines as the sun shot into the abundant foliage, long horizontal pencils of golden light.

Coffee trees grew wild, and were covered with berries nearly ripe.

The sharp hiss of a snake, as it glided away in the long grass, warned him to be careful.

Before him, in the distance, loomed a mighty mountain, rising majestically from the earth.

Its high top, hundreds of feet above the level of the sea, was hidden in the early morning by horizontal clouds, which parted as he was gazing upon them, and let down a band of bright sunlight over its dark clefts.

The unbroken sweep of its sides, from its summit to the sea was most majestic; but from narrow grooves that he perceived, Jack thought it was a volcano, and had been recently in a state of eruption.

He had not gone more than a quarter of a mile from the sea, along a level country, when he came to a slight hill.

Behind this was a clump of trees of a moderate height, and of a circular shape.

It immediately occurred to him that if those in the center were cut down, and more trees planted, or stakes, which would grow in that fertile climate—stuck in between the spaces, an excellent wall for a castle would be made.

The hill hid the trees from the shore, so that smoke from a fire would be dissipated before it reached the summit of the eminence.

On the other side, or inland, a perfect forest of trees encircled a space of about thirty acres of rich land, covered with long grass and brushwood.

This land Jack saw would do to grow corn or potatoes, or, indeed, anything which he could rescue from the wreck.

So he determined to select this as his dwelling-place.

Whether the island was inhabited or not, or what animals infested it, he could not tell.

His first care was to make a house, into which he could take everything that he could rescue from the wreck.

Storms were so violent and so sudden in those regions that they might go to sleep at night and find the next morning that not a single vestige of the ill-fated *Fairy* remained.

Returning to the creek, where he had left his companions, he took them to look at the spot he had selected for a dwelling-place.

They all approved of it, and he set Hunston and Maple to work with an ax to clear the interior, leaving a circle of trees all round.

Mr. Mole dug holes, in which were placed the trees cut down, so as to fill up the gaps, and by nightfall there was a thick fence, through which nothing could pass.

A small opening was left to serve as a door, and large sail was spread over the top to keep out the rain and dew.

While this was being done Jack and Harvey made several trips to the ship on the raft, and brought back a variety of articles which they piled in a heap on the sand. They made their dinner on salt beef and biscuit, washing it down with some excellent water which welled up from a spring near the castle, as they already called their future habitation.

For more than a fortnight they worked incessantly.

Planks brought from the ship divided the interior of the castle into rooms. Each one had a bedroom, and bedding brought from the ship supplied them with something to lie upon and the covering they had been accustomed to.

The rooms were comfortably furnished with the ship's furniture, and in one large room, which they termed the warehouse, all sorts of things were stored—guns, powder, shot, provisions—in short, all they could save from the wreck.

By tearing up the deck they made their partitions, and the doors of the cabins were easily fixed. Planks, placed slantingly against a central beam, made a capital roof, and they were able to defy the weather, while sails nailed all round the inside of the castle kept out the wind from the clinks between the trees which made the outer wall.

The bedrooms ran round the castle, and the sitting-room was in the center, being divided from the other room, or the warehouse, by long planks placed in the earth.

They had several casks of oil and lamps in which to burn it, as well as candles, biscuits, potted meats, salt beef and other things saved from the ship—provisions to last them for at least six months.

They knew not what animals and birds the island could supply them with, as they had been too busy in building their castle to look about them.

It was finished, and very proud Jack was of it.

Hidden from the sea, and protected from the wind in front by the hill we have mentioned, it was equally protected in the rear by the forest of trees.

The dog, Nero, was chained up close to the entrance, so that no one could approach without being noticed.

When the ship had been ransacked of nearly everything that was worth having, another storm arose and shattered the wreck to pieces.

Jack, however, did not care for this. It was no longer a misfortune.

His companions had worked with a will, and recognized his leadership, being well satisfied with the result of his clever devices.

They had an excellent house to live in, with ample stores to last them for some months, and though on a desert island in a remote part of the uncivilized world, they had many of the comforts and luxuries of civilization to console them in their enforced exile.

When the castle was finished, and they could cease their labors, when the floor was planked over and the wind kept out by sails, which hung like tapestry on the walls, Jack determined to give a banquet, which he did in good style.

After dinner wine was put on the table, and he rose to make a speech.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have to thank you for your laudable exertions on behalf of our little commonwealth. We have now a house to live in, which is by no means contemptible. Our stores of provisions will last us six months, or thereabouts. Now, our next care will be to explore the island, and to dig up and plant the land which lies about our castle. We have a sack of corn, some barley and potatoes.

"How long we shall be destined to live upon this island, or what our adventures may be, none of us can venture to say, but this I will assert, we have a great deal to be thankful for; and I trust that we shall live in harmony and be good friends. I know one thing, and that is, I mean to keep order in our little settlement, and, without being a tyrant, I will be obeyed. Mr. Mole knows that nothing can be done without discipline."

"Hear, hear!" from Mr. Mole.

Jack sat down, and Harvey got up, saying,

"I beg to propose the health of Jack Harkaway, our monarch. Jack the first, the king of Harkaway Islands!"

The toast was drunk with apparent enthusiasm, for however much Hunston and Maple may have disliked him in their hearts, they did not think fit to give their opinion free vent at that time.

It was agreed that the next day they would explore the island.

Each of them was supplied with a gun and powder and shot, so as to be ready for any emergency.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. MOLE COMES TO GRIEF.

MR. MOLE did not in any way attempt to thwart Jack, for he was afraid of him. Jack kept the key of the warehouse, and distributed the stores impartially; but when Mr. Mole and Hunston and Maple got together, they gave expression to their discontent.

"It's true," said Mr. Mole, "that we have a good house and everything goes on well, but we have worked hard to get together. Why should Harkaway keep the command? My age and my position entitles me to be the commander."

"Of course," replied Hunston. "If Harkaway's vanity didn't blind him, he would see that in a minute."

"I vote," said Maple, "that we take his gun some night, and make him our servant."

"Don't you know," replied Hunston, "that he and Harvey never sleep at the same time?—either he is on guard or Harvey; it's like fellows keeping watch on board ship."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Mole, "our time may come; we must not do anything in a hurry. If we were to make an attempt and fail our position would be particularly unpleasant."

"I'm not going to be his slave longer than I can help," replied Hunston.

They had been digging up the ground and planting potatoes for some hours, under a hot sun, which did not improve their temper. As Jack kept the key of the warehouse, they could get nothing to eat or drink without his permission, and were entirely in his power.

Jack and Harvey had gone out with their guns to explore the neighborhood and bring home some fresh meat if any could be found.

Some thick clouds that had been gathering began to pour down a perfect flood of rain.

The drops were so large, and fell with such momentum, that it seemed like standing under a heavy shower-bath.

Lightning gleamed as it only does in tropical lands, and the thunder roared as if a park of artillery was at work.

The little party took refuge in the castle, and were presently joined by Jack and Harvey, who had shot several parrots and a small antelope; these were prepared for dinner, and with cocoanuts and mangoes, made an excellent repast.

"The island," said Jack, "appears to be much bigger than I had any idea of. It is long and rather narrow. I think if we ascended the mountain, we could see about a couple of miles inland. We should get a good view with a glass."

"Let's go this afternoon," exclaimed Hunston. "I'm tired of planting 'taters."

"Very well. Maple shall stop at home and guard the castle and look out for tigers, for Harvey declares he saw one in a bit of jungle," replied Jack.

"That's pleasant," answered Hunston. Did you see any niggers?"

"Not the slightest, and I should fancy that the island is uninhabited."

"I propose," remarked Mr. Mole, "that we build a little hut on the top of the hill, near our house, erect a flagstaff, and spend a portion of each day on the look-out with a telescope; because I have no wish to pass the remainder of my valuable existence on this island, and if it should attract the attention of a passing ship, we should all be taken off."

"I have no objection to that," replied Jack.

The idea was considered so good that they postponed their exploring expedition, and that very day set to work and erected Mr. Mole's observatory.

An excellent view of the ocean was secured from the hill, and the Union Jack waved gayly in the breeze from the summit of the flagstaff.

"I hope it won't attract the attention of the Malay pirates, if they get into these regions," remarked Hunston.

Mr. Mole was charmed with his device, and passed hours in the box looking through a telescope, which he had placed on a stand.

Everything soon got into working order. Mr. Mole was the signalman, and his duty consisted in keeping a look-out. Harvey and Jack looked after the castle, and went out shooting. Maple was the servant and did all the drudgery; while Hunston had the management of the farm and sowed the crops.

As we have said, there was a good deal of lurking discontent at Jack's high-handed manner, but as yet it had not shown itself in any marked degree.

Choosing a very fine day, an exploring expedition was formed to ascend the mountain, which had all the appearance of an extinct volcano.

Jack, Harvey, Hunston, and Mr. Mole formed the party, Maple remaining behind to wash the plates and dishes saved from the wreck, and cook the dinner.

Several hours were occupied in ascending the sides of the mountain, but a splendid view was attained when the summit was reached.

The land extended as far as the eye could reach, and seemed rather to be part of some large continent than the little island they imagined it to be.

A hollow cone, resembling the mouth of a huge well, enabled Mr. Mole to speak with certainty about the origin of the mountain.

Standing on the edge of the extinct crater, and pointing with a bamboo to the black and yawning gulf, he exclaimed:

"My dear boys, we should never neglect an opportunity to impart useful knowledge. This is a volcanic mountain. It may have been silent for centuries, and it may break out again in five minutes."

The boys started back a little at this declaration.

"Yes," continued Mr. Mole, waving his arm grandly, "who can tell? Amid the crash of empires and the fall of worlds, what is the silence of one volcanic mountain? In these dark and murky depths was once a fountain of smoke and flame. The shaft may descend miles into the bosom of the earth. Woe to the unlucky wretch who tumbled down it!"

Suddenly there was a slight noise, as if the lava crust on which the speaker was standing was giving way.

Mr. Mole had vanished.

Two hands were seen for a moment clutching at the treacherous surface, there was a dismal yell, and the late senior master of Pomona House Academy for young gentlemen had, with as little fuss as possible under the circumstances, glided down the crater.

"Good-bye," cried Harvey.

"Why, he's gone," exclaimed Hunston. "He might have said he was going."

"It's nothing to laugh at," remarked Jack. "I don't suppose we will see him again till the next eruption."

"How about the tea garden?"

"Hunston," said Jack, in a manner of mild remonstrance, "you are an unfeeling beast. Here we are, upon a desert island, like orphan children, and yet you laugh."

"Who could help laughing? It's so comical," replied Hunston.

"If you're not serious I'll chuck you after him," said Jack, making a threatening gesture.

Hunston retreated to a safe distance.

"Can't we do something for him?" asked Harvey.

"Fraid not," replied Jack. "It's dangerous to go near. Poor old Mole!"

It seemed as if Mr. Mole had disappeared forever from

the scene, as the depth of the hole down which he had fallen might be very deep.

His only chance was to alight on some inequality in the sides. It was useless to try to help him, and the boys sorrowfully wended their way homeward, never expecting to see him again.

The loss of one of their number saddened them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BURNING MOUNTAIN.

THE accident which had happened to Mr. Mole was so sudden a nature that the boys could not actually believe for a time that one of their party had been snatched from them by a mysterious and awful death.

It seemed but a moment ago that he was talking to them, and explaining the nature of the extinct volcano that had engulfed him.

He had probably sunk deep down into the bowels of the earth, losing his life in the thick vapors which hovered about the shaft, if he was not dashed to pieces in his descent.

Even Hunston grew grave when the serious side of the matter overcame the laughable one.

"I didn't mean anything," he said; "I'm as sorry for Mole as you are, though he wasn't much good, and he'd never given me any cause to like him."

"Never say anything bad of the dead. Let him rest. We don't know whose turn it may be next," said Jack.

"You're right there," remarked Hunston. "In these countries you may put your foot on what seems to be a stick, and get bitten by a snake, or a tiger may have a go in at you for looking at him too closely, or the niggers may take a liking to your head. Hulloo! hold up."

They had reached the level ground again, and this exclamation was occasioned by a sudden movement of the earth, causing the boys to stumble.

The next minute there began a low heavy rumbling, deep down in the earth.

It was not a roar, but such a rattling or ick succession of reports as is made when a number of heavily-laden coaches are driven rapidly down a steep street paved with round cobble stones.

The following minute it seemed as if some invisible giant had seized the boys and thrown them forward, and then pulled them back with the greatest violence.

"Lie down! lie down!" shouted Jack. "It's an earthquake, and a stinger, too."

"You needn't say 'lie down' when a fellow can't keep his legs," replied Hunston, who was one of those boys who will have their say, even when death and danger are staring them in the face.

For a brief space the boys lay perfectly still, rather expecting that the earth might open and swallow them up.

The first shock, however, was not followed by another.

Jack computed that the time which elapsed between hearing the rumbling noise and the feeling of the shock was about five seconds.

It was the time of year when the monsoon prevailed, and the wind blows refreshingly day and night.

But after this earthquake there was not the slightest perceptible motion of the air.

The tree-toads stopped their steady piping, and the insects all ceased their shrill music.

"I say," cried Hunston, looking up.

"What?" asked Jack, shivering.

"Old Mole's been waking them up down below, hasn't he? Perhaps they've been waiting for him down there, and think it the cheese to give him a chvauke on his arrival."

"How can you joke at such a time as this?" asked Jack.

"Doesn't it look like it?" replied Hunston in an argumentative tone. "Here is old Mole gone and fallen down the crater of a volcano. Nobody asked him to. He did it all of his own free will, and directly afterward there's the shindy—it's cause and effect."

No one asked him. Jack and Harvey were too much upset at this perturbation of nature to care for chaffing.

Everything was so absolutely quiet that it seemed as if all nature was waiting in dread anticipation of some catastrophe.

Such an unnatural stillness was certainly more painful than the howling of the most violent tempest, or the roar of the heaviest tempest.

The utter helplessness which one feels at such a time, when even the solid earth groans and trembles beneath one's feet, makes the solitude most keenly painful.

It was half-an-hour—and that half-hour seemed an age—before the wind began to blow, or before the animals and insects resumed their rumming.

Jack had often wished to see an earthquake, but after he had witnessed one there was something in the very sound of the word which made him shudder.

The boys, finding that the earthquake was over, went back to their castle, and ate the dinner which Maple had provided for them.

Although they did not care for Mr. Mole, they could not help feeling his loss; and Jack brought some wine out of the warehouse after dinner to cheer them up a little.

It seemed to grow dark sooner than usual that evening.

Maple who had gone out for some purpose, rushed in again, saying:

"The mountain's on fire!"

"What does he mean?" asked Jack.

"I thought the earthquake meant more than we saw at first," answered Hunston. "If the mountain's on fire, as Maple says, there must be an eruption. Old Mole can't let us alone."

"I wish you'd let him alone. You have no respect for anyone, dead or alive," exclaimed Jack, angrily.

"I haven't much for you," growled Hunston.

Jack and Harvey ran outside the castle, and perceived that the mountain was actually in a state of eruption. Volcanic influences were at work,

Three distinct columns of flame had burst forth, all of them within the verge of the crater, and their tops united in a terrible, confused manner.

At intervals showers of stones about the size of walnuts were thrown into the air, and these were followed by clouds of ashes.

Jack and Harvey gazed at the terrible sight with awe. Red lines, like serpents, were to be seen on the side of the mountain, showing the course taken by the burning lava.

"Look out for Mr. Mole," said Hunston, who had followed them into the open air. "He'll come out like a fossil presently."

Jack did not feel pleased at this constant levity of Hunston's, and hitting out at him he sent him into Maple's arms, saying:

"If you haven't any decency left in you, I must teach you that I have. Get out."

Hunston retired with Maple, and his hatred of Jack increased at the blow he had received.

"Tell you what, Map, old boy," he said between his teeth, "I shan't stand this much longer. I'd rather cut the camp and go and do my best with a gun on some other part of the island. It's been King Harkaway long enough. I'll make it King Hunston, or die for it."

"You know I'll stick to you like bricks," answered Maple.

"Well wait till we see what this jolly old mountain means to do, and then leave everything to me," said Hunston. "This state of things isn't good enough for me by a long way. I can't get a glass of grog unless his majesty Jack the First is in a good temper and chances to produce a bottle from the warehouse."

The mountain continued to burn and throw up stones and lava and ashes until the middle of the next day.

Then the eruption subsided as rapidly as it had begun. It was dreadful to think that Mr. Mole's grave had been the crater of a volcano, and that his was a winding-sheet of molten lava.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUNSTON PROCLAIMS HIMSELF KING OF THE ISLAND.

ALL danger of the lava or the ashes covering the castle was at an end for the present.

Some weeks passed and everything went on at the little settlement as well as the boys could wish.

Such was the fertility of the island that the land they had dug up and planted began to show a favorable return, and a promise of excellent crops.

Jack did not expect to live there all his life, but he knew that his stores would not last forever, and if they did not make the most of their opportunities they would have to undergo great privation, if they did not die of starvation.

A good look-out was kept at the signal station which the unfortunate Mr. Mole had caused to be erected.

It seemed that the island on which their lot was cast was not in the track of ships—for not a sail was to be seen.

One day, however, Harvey, who was sweeping the sea with his glass, reported a sail, and every effort was made to arrest the attention of those on board.

A huge fire was lighted, and guns were fired without avail.

The ship passed on its way and was soon lost to sight.

"Now go, Dick," said Jack with a sigh, as the vessel's outline sank below the edge of the horizon.

"Better luck next time," said Harvey.

"I hope so. Turn it up for to-day, and come and talk to me. We'll send Maple up here, and give Hunston something to do."

Jack had put his gun down by the side of the shed. A dark figure passed quickly by him, and seized it.

"Will you give Hunston something to do?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps it will be the other way."

Jack looked up and saw Hunston. At the same time Maple had seized Harvey's gun, and the two friends were helpless.

"What do you mean?" asked Jack, clenching his fists.

"Just this. We've had enough of your reign," answered Hunston. "I'm going to be king, and if you don't obey me, why, I'll put a bullet through your head. The tables are turned now. Harvey will soon stop here and keep lookout, while you go and hoe those potatoes. When Maple and I have our dinner you may come and eat up the scraps."

"How do you feel now, Jack," asked Maple with an odious grin.

Jack gave him a kick on the shin which made him howl.

"That just served you right—who told you to speak?" remarked Hunston. "I'm king, I tell you, and I can say all I want to. Give me the key of the warehouse, Harkaway."

Jack saw Hunston place the rifle against his shoulder, and knew him well enough to be sure that he would fire if he was thwarted, so he tossed the key toward him.

"That's right," said Hunston, triumphantly; "that's how things ought to be. Go and hoe those taters, and keep the parrots out of the corn; and you, Harvey, look out, or I'll let you both know the reason why."

He walked off to the castle with Maple, and the two friends were together.

"What an ass you were to leave your gun where Hunston could see it and collar it!" exclaimed Harvey.

"I didn't know he meant treachery," answered Jack, looking very crestfallen.

"What shall you do?"

"Go and do what you told me," said Jack. "He's got the run of the sprits now, and he'll be drunk in an hour or two, and then—"

"What will you do?" asked Harvey.

"Wait and see. He'll never more be officer of mine. I'll start him. He shall see how living on coconuts and mangoes in the woods agrees with him. Perhaps he'll make a good dinner for a wild beast. I don't care. I wish he'd tumble down the hole in the mountain instead

of old Mole. Hunston always was a bad lot, but Mole had something good about him, if he was an occasional ass."

At sunset Maple came out to Jack, who had been hard at work, and said, insolently: "You may come and have your dinner now."

"May I?" asked Jack, flinging a dead snake at him, which he had killed with his spade.

"Will it bite?" asked Maple, starting back, and dropping his gun.

Jack sprang forward and seized the weapon.

"If you won't, this will," cried Jack. "Down on your knees and beg my pardon."

Maple hesitated, and Jack fired one barrel over his head, which had the effect of causing Maple to sink down with his hands clasped.

"That's it; I knew you'd do it. Where's Hunston?" continued Jack.

"In the castle," replied Maple.

"What's he doing?"

"Drinking."

"Is he tight?"

"Not quite; but getting on that way," answered Maple. "He says he's the king now, and he's going to hang Harvey to-morrow."

"Is he?" said Jack, between his teeth. "I'll let him know. Get up that tree and stop there till I come back and tell you to come down. If you dare to move I'll shoot you like a parrot."

Maple was up the tree in a flash of lightning, and Jack went to the castle.

"Is that you, Maple?" asked Hunston as the door opened.

"Yes," said Jack, altering his voice.

"Come and give me a hand up. I think there's been another earthquake or something. I've tumbled off my chair, and the beastly place goes round with me like winking."

Jack darted forward and had Hunston by the throat before he could seize his gun and attempt to defend himself.

"Hallo! what's this? Let me go, Harkaway!" cried Hunston, becoming sober.

"Not yet, my boy; you must come with me. I'll show you how to deal with rebels."

Jack dragged him into the open air, and half carried him, half pushed him to the place where he had left Maple.

"Now, Maple, come down; I want you," he said.

"What is it, Jack?" replied Maple, in a civil voice, as he made his appearance.

"Take a spade and dig a hole five feet deep and about two wide. Look sharp, unless you want a tanning."

Hunston let his eyes close, and pretended to be asleep, while the work was going on. In about an hour the hole was dug, and Maple perspiring from every pore, left off.

Jack dragged his enemy to the hole, and put him in feet foremost, and let him sink till his head was on a level with the soil.

"Shovel in!" he exclaimed.

"I say, Jack," cried Hunston, coming to himself, and growing alarmed. "Don't be a savage—remember that there are wild beasts and snakes, and birds of a carrion kind here. What do you mean to do?"

"It's a nice bed for a king. Shovel away, Maple," answered Jack.

The earth was quickly thrown in and pressed down by Jack's feet, until Hunston was buried in the soil, unable to move hand or foot, and only his head appeared above the surface.

"Give me that spade," said Jack.

Maple did so.

"You will stop here all night," continued Jack, "that is to say, if you care for your friend, and can keep off the snakes and wild things that he seems so much afraid of. I will see what is to be done with him to-morrow morning."

In vain Hunston appealed to Jack to let him go; he turned a deaf ear to his entreaties, and went to seek Harvey, to whom he related what he had done.

"Serves the beggar right," said Harvey.

"He said he meant to hang you to-morrow," continued Jack with a grin.

"Did he?" exclaimed Harvey. "Perhaps he'll think better of it."

They went to the castle and amused themselves by playing at the chess, having saved a board and men from the wreck.

Maple sat down near Hunston, and was quite unable to render him any assistance. He had neither spade nor pickaxe, and could not remove the earth.

"You've betrayed me," said Hunston, who was quite clear and sober now under the influence of the danger that threatened him. "Why don't you get me out of this?"

"I can't," replied Maple, sullenly. "It's bad enough to have to sit here all night and watch you."

"Don't leave me—for Heaven's sake don't leave me alone!" cried Hunston, in a voice of deadly terror. "Harkaway only means to punish me—he don't want to kill me. Look at that thicket. I can see the eyes of a tiger gleaming."

"A tiger?" repeated Maple.

"Yes! Look—look!" repeated the terror-stricken youth.

"Oh! If there are tigers about, I shall stop it," Maple said, coolly. "I don't care about being eaten up by the wild beasts. Good night."

Hunston's voice failed him and he could say no more. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he thought his last hour had come.

Maple walked quickly away, showing his former friend how much reliance there was to be placed upon his partnership, for Maple was one of those who always go from the losing to the winning side.

King Hunston was in a pitiable plight.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SAVAGES.

MAPLE went to the castle, and, knocking at the door, was admitted.

"What do you want?" asked Harvey.

"Tell Harkaway, please," replied Maple, "I saw tigers about, and want to come in."

"Have you left Hunston to his fate?" asked Jack, coming forward.

"Yes. I couldn't do him any good."

"You dirty little cur. Shall I pole-axe him?"

"He deserves it, but I don't think I would, because we want a servant," replied Harvey.

"All right," said Jack. "Go inside. Dick, come with me. I only want to frighten Hunston, and should be sorry if any harm came to him."

Maple went inside, and Jack followed by Harvey, walked by the soft moonlight to the place where Hunston was buried up to his neck in the ground.

When Hunston saw them he exclaimed,

"Thank God you have come. You were always a generous fellow, Harkaway. Knock me on the head, but don't leave me here to die in the night."

"I'll dig you up," replied Jack, who had brought a spade with him.

In a few minutes the earth was sufficiently loosened to admit of the captive being dragged out, and he was placed upon his legs, which for a time trembled so that he could scarcely stand upright.

"Now, what are you going to do?" asked Jack.

"I hate you, and I'll never make terms with you," replied Hunston. "I've roughed it in various parts of the world, and I dare say I can do so again. I'll work my way down the island, and if I can't turn anything up, I'll come back to you and be your servant."

"You'd best make friends, and say you won't kick over the traces again," replied Jack, good-naturedly.

"I shan't," Hunston said, sullenly. "I want to get away from you and start on my own hook. You can give me a pistol and a few charges of powder and shot if you like."

"Thank you. I'll trust you as far as I can see you and no further," Jack said. "You can stop if you like, or you can go. Take your choice."

Hunston put his hands in the pocket of his pea-jacket, and, holding down his head, walked away, soon being lost to sight among the trees that fringed the outskirts of the little farm.

"He'll come back. It's only temper," said Jack.

"What else can he do?" answered Harvey. "He's got no arms. Perhaps he might make a bow and arrow, but he'll be glad enough to come back in time."

"If he doesn't, it's not our fault. Perhaps things will go on smoother now, Dick. We never had a row when we were alone."

"And Maple is just fit for our servant," said Harvey.

"Of course he is; make him work."

"It will serve him right. He backed up Hunston in his revolt, and pretended to be such a friend of his, and when the fortune of war went against him, he was the first to leave him."

"He always was a sneak. Didn't he show the same spirit at Crawcour's?" replied Jack.

Talking in this way they returned to the castle, and finished their game of chess. Jack slept while Harvey watched, and, when Jack woke up, Harvey took his place.

Their little band was diminishing gradually. First Mr. Mole had been cut off, and now Hunston had left them.

A couple of days passed, and they saw nothing of him. Jack grew uneasy.

"I don't think I ought to leave that fellow Hunston to wander about wild in the woods," he said to Harvey.

"He's lurking about somewhere, and means to drop down upon us when we least expect it," replied the latter.

"I don't think so."

"What will you do? Let him take his chance?"

"No," replied Jack; "I shan't do that. Will you stay here with Maple? I'll take my gun and go out and look for him. I don't like the idea of leaving even Hunston to take his chance in the woods."

"You're more generous than I should be."

"Now Dick, said Jack, "you know you've got a good heart, and it won't do for you to try to make yourself out a beast."

Jack would have his own way, and shouldering his gun, he sallied forth to look for Hunston, forgetting in his generosity how badly he had treated him.

He walked for some hours, and traversed several miles of ground.

The sun was setting when he halted, weary and thirsty.

Throwing some stones up at a tree, he knocked down some ripe coconuts and quenched his thirst. Suddenly he heard a noise.

Looking before him, he saw, to his consternation, a band of savages.

He was only hidden from them by a small fringe of brushwood.

They were dancing round and round in a ring, in the middle of which was a human being tied to a stake.

Crawling on his hands and knees to the edge of the brush, Jack took a closer view.

The savages were about twelve in number, and the man in their midst was Hunston.

"It seems to me," muttered Jack, "that my presentiments did not deceive me, and I have come just in time."

His first idea was to fire, but that would have been folly, considering the number of the natives.

Yet Hunston must be rescued.

How to render him material aid was the question.

Lying on his stomach, Jack ruminated.

It was clear that the natives were performing some savage rite, and that Hunston, who had unluckily fallen into their power, was the object of it.

"I'm king of this island any way," said Jack to himself, "and I'll let them know they're not going to have it all their own way—not much."

Twelve to one, however, was great odds. For once in his life Jack was at a loss.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JACK TO THE RESCUE.

THE savages whom Jack now saw for the first time were very singular looking beings.

In height and general appearance they closely resembled the Malays.

The color of the skin and hair was dark, the latter short and crisp, confined on their heads by a red handkerchief, obtained from the natives on the extreme eastern coast.

Their clothing was simply a strip of the inner bark of a tree, beaten with stones until it had become white and opaque, and looking much like rough white paper.

This garment was three or four inches wide, and about three feet long.

It passed round the waist, and covered the loins in such a way that the ends hung down in front as far as the knee.

On the arm, above the elbow, some wore a large ring, made apparently from the stalk of a sea plant.

Each of the warriors was armed with a cleaver, which he raised high in the right hand.

Some had shields, three or four feet long, but only four or five inches wide, and others again held long spears.

Their dance was merely a series of short leaps backward and forward, with an occasional whirl round, as if trying to defend themselves from an imaginary attack in the rear.

They sang a wild song, as fast and as loud as they could.

At length the dancing warriors became more excited, and flourished their cleavers, and leaped to and fro with all their might, until it looked as if their eyes were on fire.

They worked themselves up into a state of temporary madness, and it was easy to believe that while in this condition they would no more hesitate to cleave off a human head than they would to cut down a bamboo.

These creatures belonged to the tribe of the far-famed head hunters, a race of which every traveler in the Eastern Archipelago has heard and trembled at their barbarous customs.

It is a custom with them, which has become a law, that every young man must, at least, cut off one human head before he can marry.

Heads, therefore, are in great demand.

Hunston was evidently a windfall for them, and they were rejoicing accordingly.

New heads must be obtained to celebrate such events as a birth or a funeral, as well as a marriage.

One man, taller than the rest, had a necklace made of human teeth.

Small holes had been drilled in several score of teeth, which were strung on wire, long enough to pass three times round the neck of the hero who wore it.

Jack rightly supposed him to be the chief of the ferocious band.

On the piece of paper-like bark which hangs down in front, and which we have just described, the wearer makes a mark when he cuts off a head.

The mark was in the shape of a circle; and some had as many as ten or twelve of these circles, while others had only one or two.

When the dance was over they all sat down and indulged freely in an intoxicating liquor, made from the juice of the flowering part of a palm.

Then they began to dance again, and the chief tossed into their midst a human head, apparently not long severed from its trunk, for it was all smeared with clotted blood.

This they proceeded to kick wildly about, as if it had been a football.

A sickening sensation, akin to fear, crept over Jack, as he lay hid, watching the awful carnival of those fiends.

"Very jolly sort of neighbors to have," muttered Jack. "I wonder what they are going to do with old Hunston? He don't look happy."

"Nor did he."

As he was bound to the stake, Hunston's face had assumed an expression of utter hopeless terror, and at times he closed his eyes as if he could not bear the hideous sight before him, and wished to shut it out.

It was clear that when Hunston gave way to his temper and left his party, he had wandered about the island until he fell in with the natives, and was captured.

Perhaps he intended to return and try and surprise Jack and Harvey again, and make them his slaves.

He was bad enough for anything.

However Jack was far too generous to allow his companion to perish.

He could not find it in his heart to leave him in the hands of the barbarians whom he saw dancing around him, and celebrating a feast of blood.

When he was at Mr. Crawcour's academy he had produced a singular effect upon everybody by his talent in ventriloquism.

It occurred to him now that if Mr. Crawcour and his masters could be startled by the exercise of this singular art, the savages were much more likely to be impressed by it.

No sooner had he imbibed the idea, than he determined to put it into execution.

It was true that he was armed with a double-barreled breech-loading rifle, but he did not like to take life unnecessarily and without due provocation.

Besides the killing of one or two natives would only make the others more savage.

Blood for blood is a principle of the savage.

Suddenly throwing his voice into the air, he exclaimed:

"Hunston, old man, how do you find yourself?"

The effect of this speech was magical.

The savages stopped their war dance, and looked up anxiously and inquiringly.

Neglected lay the head they had been kicking about.

But was upon Hunston that the effect of the observation was most marked.

He recognized Jack's voice, and he knew he was ventriloquist.

Just as the wretch on the scaffold may go from despair to hope, so did Hunston's face give up its blackness and assume a happier look.

"Keep up your courage," continued Jack, "I'm not far off."

Hunston made no answer, but looked at the thief in a peculiar way.

Jack saw the significant look.

"He means something," he thought. "I must be careful."

For a time he remained silent.

When the natives had recovered from the astonishment, the chief, whose name was Banda Navia, called by his followers the Tuan Biza, or great chief, approached the captive.

Now Jack saw why Hunston had put on such a singular expression.

The Tuan Biza had, by meeting traders on the coast of Coram, whither he had been taken when young, picked up a knowledge of English, and Hunston was afraid Jack might say too much.

The suspicion of the Tuan Biza would be at once aroused if he heard any familiar phrases.

It was Jack's object to make him think that the Great Spirit was speaking.

All the savage tribes on these islands believe in a Great Spirit, and in witchcraft.

It was their well-known superstition that Jack hoped to play upon.

Speaking to Hunston, the chief said:

"Was that a spirit we heard?"

"Yes," answered Hunston. "It was my guardian angel."

"What did it say?"

"Listen. It will speak again."

Jack heard this conversation and exclaimed:

"Kill him not. If you do, you will incur my vengeance."

"It says you are to spare my life," cried Hunston, overpowered with joy.

The Tuan Biza translated this to the warriors, who seemed much concerned.

One of them, named Curo, who was famed for his wicked and cruel disposition, stood forward.

"He is our captive," he said, pointing to Hunston, "and by our laws we are allowed to kill him. What is the spirit which forbids our doing so? One of our young men is about to be married, and wants a head. It is not well that a captive should be spared."

Keyali, who had regarded Hunston as his special property, gave a grunt of approval.

"You hear what the spirit from the clouds above our head has declared," replied the Tuan Biza.

Jack spoke again, and this time his voice was so near the chief as to make him start.

"If he is hurt," he exclaimed, "dread the fiery mountain which shall cover you with stones and ashes. It does not please me that he shall die, as he is under my protection."

"Why then, O spirit, did you let them fall into our hands?" asked the chief.

"Because, O, Tuan Biza, replied Jack, giving the chief his title, "he has displeased me. It is the custom of some of our tribe to tattoo their skins, and I doubt not that you will find one of our number who understands the art. Let the captive, then, be pricked all over in curious devices and marked with the juice of a nut."

The Tuan Biza turned to his friends and related the order of the spirit, who seemed to please them immensely.

Hunston, however, did not relish the order at all.

"I say, Jack," he said, "don't, for goodness sake, tell them that. They'll do it. I shall be as ugly as a Red Indian."

"Serve you right," answered Jack coolly. "You and I have had a score to pay off this ever so long."

"I'll tell them where the castle is, and make them come and fight you," continued Hunston.

"They'll get pepper, if they do," Jack said; "and if you threaten me, I'll tell them I've changed my mind, and that interesting youth, Keyali, or whatever his name is, who is going to be married and wants a head, according to custom, shall have yours."

"Jack, dear Jack," cried Hunston. "Don't let them tattoo me. Fancy what I shall look like if I ever get back to England."

The Tuan Biza thought Hunston was saying his prayers, and beseeching the spirit to intercede for him.

"What you call your spirit? Is it Jack?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Hunston.

The chief informed the savages that the spirit who watched over the white man was called Jack, and they imbibed a great respect for the name at once.

"Tattoo him at once," said Jack.

The chief being thoroughly awed by the voice, ordered Hunston's clothes to be removed, and a sharp fish bone was procured with which to puncture holes in the skin.

"Will the spirit like him to be marked with birds and fishes?" asked the Tuan Biza.

"Birds, fishes and serpents," answered Jack, "with a parrot on each cheek and a small crocodile on the nose."

"I say, Jack," cried Hunston again, "this won't do. I'd rather die. Fancy going about the Strand or Regent Street with a parrot on each cheek, and a small crocodile on the nose. Don't; I'll pay you out if you do."

"You've done all the malicious and beastly things to me you could do," replied Jack, "and I'm not afraid of you. Those who offend a greater power than themselves must pay the penalty. O, Tuan Biza, you have found favor in our sight. Proceed at once with the—a—what do you call it?—tattooment."

The chief, Banda Navia and Baru understood the art of tattooing, for they had traveled about the archipelago in prahus or large boats, trading with nutmegs and spices

which grew in abundance on trees in the group of islands on which the *Fairy* was wrecked.

They had seen sailors do it as well as remote tribes, and Banda Navia was no bad artist.

Hunston was stripped to the waist.

The fishbone was wielded by the chief, and its point proved quite as sharp as that of a needle, as if it had been rubbed on a stone.

Buru was prepared with the juice to make the stain when rubbed into the pricked skin.

The warriors began to sing and dance again, and determined to have some fun over this ceremony, if they could not have any over that of cutting off his head.

"Jack, Jack," cried Hunston, as the fish bone began to describe circles over his face.

Jack remained obstinately silent.

"I'll say you are not a spirit, and it's all humbug," continued Hunston.

"Go it my tulip," answered Jack, "they'll only cut off your head. It makes no odds to me particularly, but you're so jolly ugly as you are, I thought I'd have you beautified, and make you look pretty, that's all my hearty."

Jack said this in his own voice, and from the thicket where he was concealed.

In a moment Jack saw his mistake.

The chief, who was a shrewd fellow, began to move in that direction.

There was danger of the trick being found out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HUNSTON IS TATTOOED.

FORTUNATELY Jack could see all that was going on.

His presence of mind did not desert him.

When the chief had reached the edge of the cleared space in which the savage rites were celebrated, and was gaining Jack's hiding-place, the latter imitated the hiss of a snake.

This was done to perfection.

It seemed just under the feet of Tuan Biza.

He started back with an expression of horror, and Jack shifted his position.

A large tree was close by, and he hid behind its trunk.

The Tuan Biza changed his mind, and did not search any further.

The natives proceeded with the process of tattooing, and as Hunston was led to a stake, he was unable to offer an opposition.

After tattooing his face and nose, his back, chest and sides were operated upon.

A stinging sensation, like that produced by the bites of mosquitoes, assailed the victim of this cruel joke.

But it must be recollected that Hunston had done many things to make Jack his enemy.

He and Maple had actually tried to leave him and Harvey to drown in the sinking ship.

There was a limit to generosity, and though Jack could be a good friend, he could be a good hater.

When the tattooing was completed, the chief, looking upward, said:

"O spirit, it is well?"

Hunston was writhing in agony.

He actually frothed at the mouth, not altogether through physical pain, but because he thought of the singular figure he should present ever afterward.

There is no process which will affect tattooing.

When the marks are once made with the point of anything sharp, and the dye, if it is a lasting one, rubbed in, they last a man's lifetime.

"You have done well, O, Tuan Biza," replied Jack, still speaking from the air near the stake. "Keep the captive till the sun sets, and then release him."

The chief bowed his head, for he was superstitious enough to think that when the snake hissed it was a serpent sent by the spirit to sting him for listening to what Hunston had said.

At any other time Hunston would not have betrayed his companions.

Indeed, he had been threatened with death by the savages before Jack came up, because he would not tell how he came upon the island or how many companions he had.

This must be stated in his favor.

Now he was so maddened and furious at being tattooed that he felt no pity for any of his comrades.

"Let me go," he said, "and I'll tell you something worth knowing. I have companions on this island. We were wrecked here about a couple of months ago."

The Tuan Biza pricked up his ears, thinking he was going to hear something agreeable.

"How many?" he asked.

Hunston was about to reply, when Jack, seeing the danger that threatened him, imitated his voice, and made him say:

"Fifty-five."

The chief looked grave.

"There were four with me, but now there are only three," exclaimed Hunston.

Just now you said fifty-five. Why do you

say one thing one minute and then alter your number?" asked Tuan Biza.

"It wasn't me; it's Jack," answered Hunston, driven wild with pain and annoyance. The chief shook his head.

It was his opinion that Hunston was going mad.

Buru, the savage-minded native of whom we have spoken, approached with his cleaver and threatened his captive.

Speaking in his own language, he said he and his companions were not satisfied with the conduct of the chief.

The captive had said that he and his companions wanted heads.

The Tuan Biza replied that the spirit had forbidden him to touch Hunston.

Buru made a derisive gesture, and danced round contemptuously, cutting what we should call a caper.

He snapped his fingers in the air, and again threatened Hunston with the cleaver.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "what can the spirit do? Keyali, our young man, must have his head."

Keyali stepped forward, much elated at the turn affairs was taking.

"Beware!" thundered Jack. "Fire and smoke will come down from heaven and consume. Release the captive at sunset. Dare to touch a hair of his head and you shall die."

Buru had been drinking rather too freely of the intoxicating liquor we have alluded to.

He snapped his fingers again and led Keyali toward Hunston.

The other savages hung back.

Jack saw that it was necessary to act.

Bringing his double-barreled gun to a level with his shoulder, he prepared to fire.

It was not his object to kill either Buru or Keyali, but he wanted to make an example and strike terror into them.

So he aimed at Buru's leg, because he was the foremost in opposition and the most ferocious-looking.

"Strike!" said Buru to Keyali.

At that moment Jack pulled the trigger.

Buru fell to the ground, weltering in his blood.

Keyali ran away into the bush, and did not stop till he had gone some miles.

Then he sat down on the ground and began to examine himself to see if he was hit.

The warriors were thunderstruck for a brief time, after which they chattered like a lot of monkeys.

Some examined Buru and bound up his wound, while others, headed by the Tuan Biza, ran into the thicket from whence the smoke came.

But Jack was too quick for them.

Directly after firing he ran away and hid again at some distance.

They could find nothing, and their dismay was immense.

It was their firm belief that the fire came out of heaven, as the spirit said it should.

From that instant Hunston's life was sacred in their eyes.

Even Buru would not bear thought of harming him.

The wound inflicted upon the latter was situated in the thigh, and though painful, not dangerous or necessarily fatal.

Feeling that he had saved Hunston's life, Jack hurried home to the castle, where he knew Harvey must be waiting for him with the utmost impatience.

He had established a certain power over the natives; but he feared that since Hunston had told them there were other white people on the island, they would never rest until they had found them out.

Whether the savages lived at the extreme end of the island, or had come to this particular one to celebrate some custom, he could not tell.

It was enough for him just then to come up in the nick of time, and prevented Hunston from having his head cut off by Keyali.

The mention of head-cutting was conclu-

sive in Jack's mind that the natives he had seen were the dreaded and far-famed head-hunters.

Tired and hungry he reached the castle.

Harvey was on the look-out, rifle in hand.

"Hullo, Jack," he said; "I thought you were never coming back. Seen anything?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"What?"

"Niggers."

"No! have you really?" said Harvey, much excited. "Have they got Hunston?"

"There's no mistake about that; they've got him hard and fast. It serves him right for playing tricks with us and being treacherous. If he hadn't given way to his temper he'd have been all right."

"Will they eat him?"

"I don't think they are cannibals; they didn't look like it," answered Jack, "though they are ugly enough for anything. In my opinion they are a tribe or off-shoot of the Dyak head-hunters of Borneo, and nothing like nice neighbors."

"Did you try to save him?" asked Harvey.

"I did save him. As it happened, I just came up at the time they were about to perform upon him, about a dozen of them. Such ugly-looking beasts!"

"Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"You'll see him before long," said Jack, laughing, "and I'll bet you a sovereign, which, by-the-by, I could not pay if I lost, as we haven't got any money among us, that you won't know him."

"Why not?" replied Harvey.

"His own mother wouldn't know him. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at?"

"Never mind," said Jack, "I've paid Master Hunston out for all he has done for me. You will know all about it soon enough. Give me some grub. I'm dead beat."

"I don't know what you'll have to eat," replied Harvey; "the ants have got into the biscuits, and there is nothing but the kegs of salt beef I have not opened."

"I'll tell you how to dodge the ants," answered Jack.

"How?"

"Put a saucer full of water under each leg of a table, and they can't get up. Look out! There's a parrot. Odds I pot him."

As he spoke Jack fired at a gaudy-plumaged bird, and brought it down.

"Put him in some hot water," he continued, "the feathers will come off, then clean him and cut him open. He'll do fine on the gridiron; or, look here, where's Maple? Make him do it."

"All right. Maple's civil enough. He's been on his knees, as one may say, ever since Hunston cut it," replied Harvey.

"Here, you, Maple," cried Jack, "you're to be head cook and bottle-washer; take this parrot, and get him ready for my dinner! If you're not slippery over it, I pity you."

Maple set to work with alacrity, and in a quarter of an hour Jack had a very good broil, for it must be recollected that they had saved from the wreck all the cooking utensils and things for use that they wanted.

What Harvey had said about the ants was quite true.

They were pests.

The little insects got into everything that was not protected.

If a bird was shot and laid down for an hour there would not be much of it left, and they ran up everything in swarms.

While Jack was having his dinner, Maple approached him and said:

"It is true that Hunston has been caught by the savages?"

"Yes; and so will you if you don't watch it," answered Jack with his mouth half full of broiled parrot.

"You won't give me to them, will you?"

"That depends upon how you behave yourself."

"I'll never do anything to offend you again," said Maple, with tears in his eyes,

"and I am glad they've got Hunston, because he set me on against you all along. If they cut him, it will only serve him right."

"Get out," exclaimed Jack in a tone of great disguise. "I have you more now than I did before. You are a worse sneak than I thought you were."

"Why, Jack?" asked Maple.

"Don't call me Jack," replied he. "You and Hunston have been friends ever since you have known one another. You're as bad as he, and it's cowardly of you to let him down. Get up."

"Oh! if you have taken a spite against me, I can't help it," returned Maple, surly.

Jack threw a biscuit at him, and he made his escape into the open air, looking more like a cowardly sneak than he usually did, and that is saying a great deal.

When Jack had satisfied his hunger, he called Harvey.

"You must keep a good look-out to-night," he exclaimed.

"Why more to-night than any other?" asked Harvey.

"I'll tell you why, Dick," answered Jack. "Those head-hunting niggers have an idea that there are white people on the island, and they will search for them. That's for sartin, as the African observed, when he was told he'd be hanged for eating his grandmother."

Harvey laughed.

"It wouldn't be pleasant to wake up in the morning, and find our heads gone," Jack went on.

"If our heads were off, we shouldn't wake any more," Harvey said.

"Yes, we should, we should wake in another land," answered Jack, smiling.

"Don't interrupt me. I'm tired, and you must watch till twelve; then call me. Let Maple sleep. We can't depend on the little varmint. If Hunston comes in, wake me at once, only don't take him for Tippoo Sahib in his warpaint."

"I wish you'd tell me what has happened to Hunston," exclaimed Harvey.

"I won't spoil the fun. All I say is this. Hunston will be let go at sunset. I've worked the oracle so far and I shan't say any more at present," replied Jack.

"I dare say it will keep," rejoined Harvey, in a tone of annoyance. "But about the natives? My only wonder is the beggars haven't found us out before. We've got quite a little farm about here."

"Yes; but we're in a sheltered nook, and they wouldn't spot us now if they didn't follow Hunston."

"You think they'll do that?"

"I don't think, I know it. Niggers all over the world are the dodgiest beasts out. So keep your swivel eye open."

"Never fear," replied Harvey. "I'm wide awake. They won't catch this weasel with both eyes shut."

Jack was satisfied with his answer, and, though the sun had not yet set, lay down to rest.

The fatigue in the hot noontide he had gone through was enough to make an ordinary mortal sleepy.

And sleep he did, like a top that hums, for he snored loud enough to scare the mosquitoes away, as Harry observed with a laugh to Maple.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TREACHERY IN THE CAMP.

MAPLE was thoroughly cowed in the absence of Hunston, and obeyed every command which was given him by Harvey without a word.

His evil, malevolent nature could only plot—he had not the courage to carry out his wicked designs.

Coming up to Harvey about sunset, while the latter, gun in hand, was keeping guard during Jack's sleep, as he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree outside the castle, he said:

"Do you want me any more?"

"Yes," replied Harvey.

"What for?"

"That's nothing to you."

"But I should like to know. I've been weeding the corn all day, and I'm as tired as—help me to a simile."

"I shan't," answered Harvey. "If you can't find similies, go without them, or, if you must have similies, say 'as sleepy as an ass,' which is what you are."

"You're always on me," said Maple, with a subdued growl. "I suppose you think you can do as you like with me, because you've got me on a desert island and Hunston's sloped."

"It isn't deserted. Jack's seen savages."

"Has he? How many, and what are they like?" asked Maple, in surprise.

"You'll know in time. Hunston will be here soon."

"Will he? That's good news. He won't have me slave-driven. But what am I to do now?" Maple said, his face brightening at the news of Hunston's return.

"Skin a deer."

"Where is it?" Maple inquired, looking round.

"You'll see directly. I'm on the watch. The deer have been at the corn. They come about this time, and I mean to have a shot at one of the gentlemen," replied Harvey.

It was a lovely evening.

There was a constant changing of beautiful colors in the clouds that rested on the high mountain-peaks in the south, while the day was fading into twilight, and the twilight in its turn subsiding into a fine starlight night.

A little way off they could hear the sand-pipers come and trip to and fro on the beach when the tide was full.

Many long-winged night-hawks swooped back and forth, feasting on multitudes of insects that came out as evening approached.

The deer of which Harvey spoke were most destructive.

They were accustomed to come into the prairie lands in great droves, and frequently an area of a quarter of an acre was so completely rooted up by them that it looked as if it had been plowed.

This was annoying, as the corn the boys had planted was making good progress under the fertilizing influence of the climate.

Presently there was the sound of hoofs clattering on the hard ground.

Harvey fired, and brought down a fine deer.

He had learned how to shoot, and having a quick eye, was as good a shot as Jack.

"Well shot," cried Maple. "You potted him splendidly. It was stunning."

"It'll be more stunning when you've skinned him and cut him up. Take a sharp knife, and I'll make a cat gallows to hang the flesh on," replied Harvey.

Accordingly he cut down a couple of saplings, and placed them in the ground.

Over these he tied a horizontal bar.

Then he made a hole in the ground at the foot of each upright pole, and puddled the bottom with clay to make them hold water.

By this means he prevented the white ants climbing up the poles.

They would have eaten all the meat before morning if he had not adopted the plan of surrounding the sticks with water.

When the strips of fresh meat were hanging on the cross-bar, he lighted a fire underneath, and smoked them, placing a couple of steaks on the flames for his and Maple's supper.

"Not bad tackle this," observed Maple, as he cut into his steak. "Venison's fine when you've had nothing but salt junk and biscuit for a week."

While the boys were eating their supper there was a sound of footsteps.

Harvey sprang to his feet and shouldered his rifle.

"Fire! fire! It's a nigger," said Maple.

The intruder held up his hand, and said:

"Don't you know me?"

"I'll be hanged if I do," replied Maple; "and if it is—no, it can't be—yes, it is Hunston."

Hunston it was.

But how altered!

His face was haggard, and his eyes blood-shot.

Naked to the waist, as when the Indians let him go, in obedience to what they considered the command of a spirit, appeared in all the grotesque horror of his recent tattooing.

His back presented a perfect nest of snakes, and a huge python coiled on his shoulders.

Parrots and other birds were represented on his chest and arms, while his stomach gave one a very good idea of a tiger crouching for his spring, and underneath all was a belt of fishes.

On each cheek was a parrot and on his nose a small crocodile.

He was smarting with the pain of the tattooing, and his skin presented an angry and inflamed appearance.

A more diabolical-looking object could not have startled his companions.

Maple began to laugh.

He could not have helped.

"Why, Hunston, old man," exclaimed Harvey, joining in the merriment, his condition excited, "what have they been doing to you? Is it paint?"

"I wish to goodness it was," answered Hunston, in a hollow voice, "then it would wash off, but now I'm marked for life."

"I must say you look pretty. You're quite a work of art. I never saw such a picture. You ought to be stuffed and sent to the British museum."

"I'll stuff you if you chaff me," answered Hunston. "Give me some of your grub. I'm very nearly starved."

"How did you get away?" asked Maple, putting a slice of deer meat on the fire.

"It was Jack's ventriloquism that did it," replied Hunston, with a groan.

"He funk'd the critters awfully, and there was one buffer, the Tuan Biza, or chief, who quite thought it was a spirit, but I wish he'd left me to die, I do. What good am I, pricked about like this? I'll have my revenge, though, see if I don't!"

Maple had been trying to smother his laughter, but he could not do so any longer.

"Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" he broke out, ducking his head, and laughing till his sides shook.

"What are you grinning at, ugly?" cried Hunston, seizing him by the ear. "I'll give you something to howl at."

"Oh, don't Hunston!" exclaimed Maple. "I couldn't help it. You looked so comical."

Hunston dragged him to the fire, and bending him down by his superior strength, put his head in the flames.

In a minute almost all his hair was singed off, and he would have been seriously burnt if Harvey had not pulled him away.

"Now you look comical, and I'll make you more so if you don't watch it," replied Hunston, savagely.

Maple did look funny without his hair, and retired to a distance, rubbing his scorched head and crying.

When Hunston had satisfied his hunger he was a little better tempered, and Harvey gave him a little bottle of wine which had been saved from the wreck.

"Stop that bellowing," he exclaimed, to Maple, who was still roaring.

"You can go to roost as soon as you like," said Harvey.

"How can I sleep with a singed head? It stings so," answered Maple.

"Go and get some grease, and rub it well in, and put on a sailor's cap," suggested Harvey.

"Your thatch will grow again," remarked Hunston, "while my beauty will never come back. My figure-head is ornamented for life, but I'll be one with Master Jack Harkaway."

Harvey did not like the persistent way in which he spoke of his cherished vengeance.

"Don't rile Jack too much," he said, "or he may wipe you out altogether."

"Two can play at that game," returned Hunston, "and you'd better keep out of it. I've no row with you at present."

"Your bad or good opinion doesn't matter much to me," answered Harvey, carelessly.

"Doesn't it? We shall see. I'm desperate now, and if you quarrel with me you'll find it no bottle, as the sailors say; so shut up before there's any harm done!" Hunston exclaimed, threateningly.

"Why can't you live on friendly terms with us?" asked Harvey. "I am sure we ought to be more friendly than ever in our lonely position, with all sorts of dangers staring us in the face."

"You'll have enough of them soon," said Hunston, significantly, "and you should have more sense than to suppose that I can ever be jolly with you after this."

He pointed to his face.

"Jack did not do it."

"He told the savages to do it, which comes to the same thing."

"At the same time he saved your life, which you did not deserve."

"What's the use of my life to me?" asked Hunston. "I can never return to a civilized country with a face like this. I tell you he has just made me desperate, that's all."

"Did you not try to drown Jack and I, and poor Mr. Mole when the *Fairy* was abandoned?"

Hunston was silent.

"If you want to argue you shall have enough of it," continued Harvey. "I suppose Jack thought you were only good enough to live among savages. It's what your bad disposition has brought you to."

"You'd look foolish if I brought the savages down on you," remarked Hunston.

"What good would that do you?" asked Harvey. "We are your friends, are we not? At least we are as friendly as you will let us be. The fact is, you were always a bad fellow, and I don't blame Jack for what he has done. But there may be hope for you yet."

"What hope?" cried Hunston.

"All the tattooing I have seen on board ship has been done with India ink, which won't come out."

"Well?"

"Suppose the dye of the berry the savage used is not lasting."

Hunston's face grew positively indignant at this suggestion.

"God grant what you suggest may be true. It sounds too good, however. A week or two will show. It's kind of you, Harvey, to try and comfort me. I thought you all hated me."

"Jack doesn't hate you in his heart. He's not the sort of fellow to hate anyone, only remember your last attempt to take the command here and make us your slaves. You can't be trusted—you are so treacherous and evilly disposed."

"Jack had best look out."

"I wonder you don't feel grateful to him for saving you," Harvey said. "I'm not exactly a pious sort of a fellow, as you know, though I try to steer clear of anything wrong, and—"

"Ah, yes, I daresay!" sneered Hunston. "You're one of those saints who carry a Bible in their pockets."

"I have got a Bible, I am thankful to say, in my pocket. It was my mother's last gift, and I find a good deal of comfort in it now and then, though I am sorry that I don't read it so much as I ought."

"You've got one?"

"Yes, and I'm not ashamed of it," replied Harvey, resolutely. "But what I was going to say is this—"

"I shall slip my cable and sleep in the woods if you are going to preach."

"Only a word or two. Don't you think

you are better here with us than if you had been killed, and sent as you are to be judged? One ought to pay a little attention to these things."

"Oh, don't bother me!" answered Hunston, uneasily. "I want to be quiet and think."

Harvey said no more.

As he watched Hunston doze, after his dinner, he fancied his face assumed a villainous expression.

Bad thoughts were evidently lurking in his mind.

Of course the tattooing disfigured him, and made him look repulsive and even ferocious, though there was a comical side to that also.

"I must warn Jack," muttered Harvey. "There is something in the beggar's look which I don't like. If he does not mean mischief, I can't read faces."

Full of thought, he paced up and down, keeping a good lookout, and breathing with more ease, now a cool current of air, such as the evening brings, took the place of the garish light of day and its sultry atmosphere.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JUST IN TIME.

HUNSTON, who was thoroughly exhausted, fell asleep.

The wind, in heavy gusts, sighed through the dense foliage over his head, while in the distance rose the deep, pulsating roar of the ocean surf.

Inland was a deep ravine, and from its furthest recesses rolled out the reverberating, moaning cries of monkeys, who, all the night long, kept a piteous calling, each answering his fellows in the same mournful tones.

Hunston's dreams were not pleasant.

A storm was coming on, to avoid which Harvey entered the castle, still on the look out.

At midnight a troubled dream disturbed the rest of Hunston.

An indefinite terror thrilled along his veins as he fancied for a moment that he was whirling round and round in a deep, yawning maelstrom.

Then a change occurred, but scarcely one for the better.

He fancied he was fixed in the midst of a waterspout, and in his struggles to escape, awoke to find that a great stream of water was pouring down upon him from the leaves of a palm under which he was sleeping.

A heavy shower had come on.

Getting up he went to the house the boys had built, and was about to enter when he was stopped by Harvey.

"You can't come inside," said the latter.

"Why not? Do you want me to catch rheumatism out in the wet?" answered Hunston.

"I'll ask Harkaway. It's time to call him, but the fact is, after the threats you used, I am afraid of you."

"I shan't hurt you," said Hunston, with a laugh. "It would be easy enough, if I felt inclined. What's to prevent me from cutting your throat like a rabbit?"

Harvey shuddered.

Hunston spoke in such a cold-blooded way that he feared him more than ever; but, touching his gun, he exclaimed—

"Only this, my boy. This will stop you."

"Let me in to-night, and I'll cut the shop to-morrow," Hunston said, pleadingly, "I shall be better off with the savages."

Harvey woke Jack, saying—

"It's your turn to watch now. I am pretty well done up."

Has Hunston come back?" asked Jack, springing up.

"Oh, yes; let the poor beast in."

"Be on the look-out. He's in a nice state of mind, I can tell you."

"Well, it isn't to be wondered at. What does he look like?" asked Jack with a grin.

"Beautiful. He's a sort between a zebra and a chimpanzee with the measles."

Hunston stepped forward.

He had heard this remark and exclaimed—

"What are you? I should call you a cross between a laughing jackass and a baboon with a dash of Tom Fool in you."

"Look here! stash that sort of thing," cried Jack. "I'm cook here. You must not cheek, Harvey."

"Why can't he let me alone?"

"It's his playful nature. He is not savage like you."

"Enough to make me savage. Look at my face," growled Hunston.

"I will in the morning, when there's more light; at present our lamp is rather dim. But you ought to feel flattered at the delicate attention the natives have paid you."

"I shan't answer you. I'm going to pitch in the corner. My unfortunate nut aches fit to split," Hunston observed.

"Behold him, ladies and gentlemen, but at the same beware," Jack went on, "for he takes the most lovely maidens into the topmost branches of the highest trees, regardless of their piteous cries and the agonized entreaties of their frenzied relatives."

"Shut up, you fool!" cried Hunston, who could not keep his temper.

"I'm only doing the showman," Jack answered.

"You might let a fellow get a few winks of sleep after all he has gone through."

"All right. Dick be quiet. The pictorial ape sleeps."

Hunston pretended to snore, but he did not sleep.

He was watching his opportunity, which came sooner than he expected.

Harvey threw himself down, and also made him believe that he was worn out and wanted rest.

But he distrusted Hunston, and determined to watch him.

Only the humming of the night-birds and insects, with the occasional hiss of a snake and the wild and horrid noise made by some wild beasts in the jungle, broke the silence of the night.

The rain had cleared up as suddenly as it had come on.

Jack took a peep outside, standing half in and half out of the doorway.

The rain that had fallen rose again in thick heavy vapor from the hot ground.

Knowing that this very often gave rise to fevers, Jack did not venture out.

Hunston had not taken his snake-like eyes off him.

Seeing his back turned, he rose on his hands and knees.

Opening his clasp-knife, he placed it between his teeth, and crawled stealthily toward his victim.

In an instant Harvey was after him.

Just as he started up in the dim mist of that tropical night to plunge his knife into the back of Harkaway, who was totally unsuspecting of his intention, Harvey was upon him.

Throwing his arms round his neck, he put on a hug that nearly strangled him.

He fell on his back on the floor of the hut, and Harvey placed his knee on his chest.

"Would you?" he said.

"What's the shine, Dick?" asked Jack, turning round.

"Can't you see?"

"I can't make out exactly."

"It would have been all up the Baltic with you in a brace of shakes if I hadn't guessed what his game was and watched him. He'd got a knife to stab you with."

"Had he, by jingo?" replied Jack, who now began to realize the narrow escape he had.

Hunston glanced sullenly and defiantly at them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN UGLY FIX.

PRESENTLY Jack spoke.

"I'll tell you what it is, old man," he exclaimed, "if you play tricks with me, it's either your life or mine, and as king of this island I shall have to try you by court-martial and let the daylight into you with an ounce of lead."

"I didn't mean anything," answered Hunston, cowering before him.

"What had you a knife for?"

"You see I was dreaming, and walked in my sleep."

"It won't wash," said Jack.

"What I've gone through upset my mind. I thought I was going to attack one of the natives and make my escape."

"It isn't good enough," continued Jack.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Not by a long way. You're a bad lot, Mr. Hunston, and you'll have to make tracks."

"What?"

"Walk your chinks."

"Why?"

"Because, when you get back to England, if you ever do, you need not be hard up," answered Jack.

"Go on," said Hunston. "It pleases you and it doesn't hurt me."

"Or you might be advertised as the marvelous man-monkey, ornamental if not useful."

"You won't send me away! How can I live unarmed, in the open?" pleaded Hunston.

"You stepped it of your own accord a little while ago, and now you'll hook it to please me."

"That was temper. I meant to come back, only the natives copped me," replied Hunston. "Come, Jack, make it up. I swear I didn't mean any harm. You were always more generous to me than I deserved. Don't kick me out like a dog. There are wild beasts on the island, and I saw snakes. These are not nice companions, let alone the head-hunting natives."

"It's your own fault."

"Don't be hard on me. I know what that means," said Hunston, gloomily. "You'll let me be quiet till the morning, and then you'll shunt me. If I go by myself on this island I must croak, you know that."

"No, I don't. Forage for yourself."

"You don't seem to see exactly what you are doing," Hunston said. "But I'll tell you if Harvey will let me go."

"Let him get up, Dick," said Jack.

Hunston rose and shook himself, like a Newfoundland dog on getting out of the water.

"Go ahead," continued Jack. "I'm so far up to you, that you don't perform on me. I'm wide awake enough."

"If you send me away, you drive me into the hands of the natives. They won't kill me now, because they consider me under the protection of a spirit, and they will be glad enough to have me, when I tell them where the spirit is, and what a nice, little, well-stored crib he's got here."

"You're villain enough for anything," exclaimed Jack.

"If I'm driven to it."

"Were you driven to trying to annoy me at school, or to drown me on board ship, or to make yourself master here, or to go in for stabbing me to night?" said Jack, looking pointedly at him.

"Let the past drop. I'm talking about what you're driving me to now," answered Hunston.

"You double distilled ass," exclaimed Jack, impatiently. "Do you think I can see through you?"

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